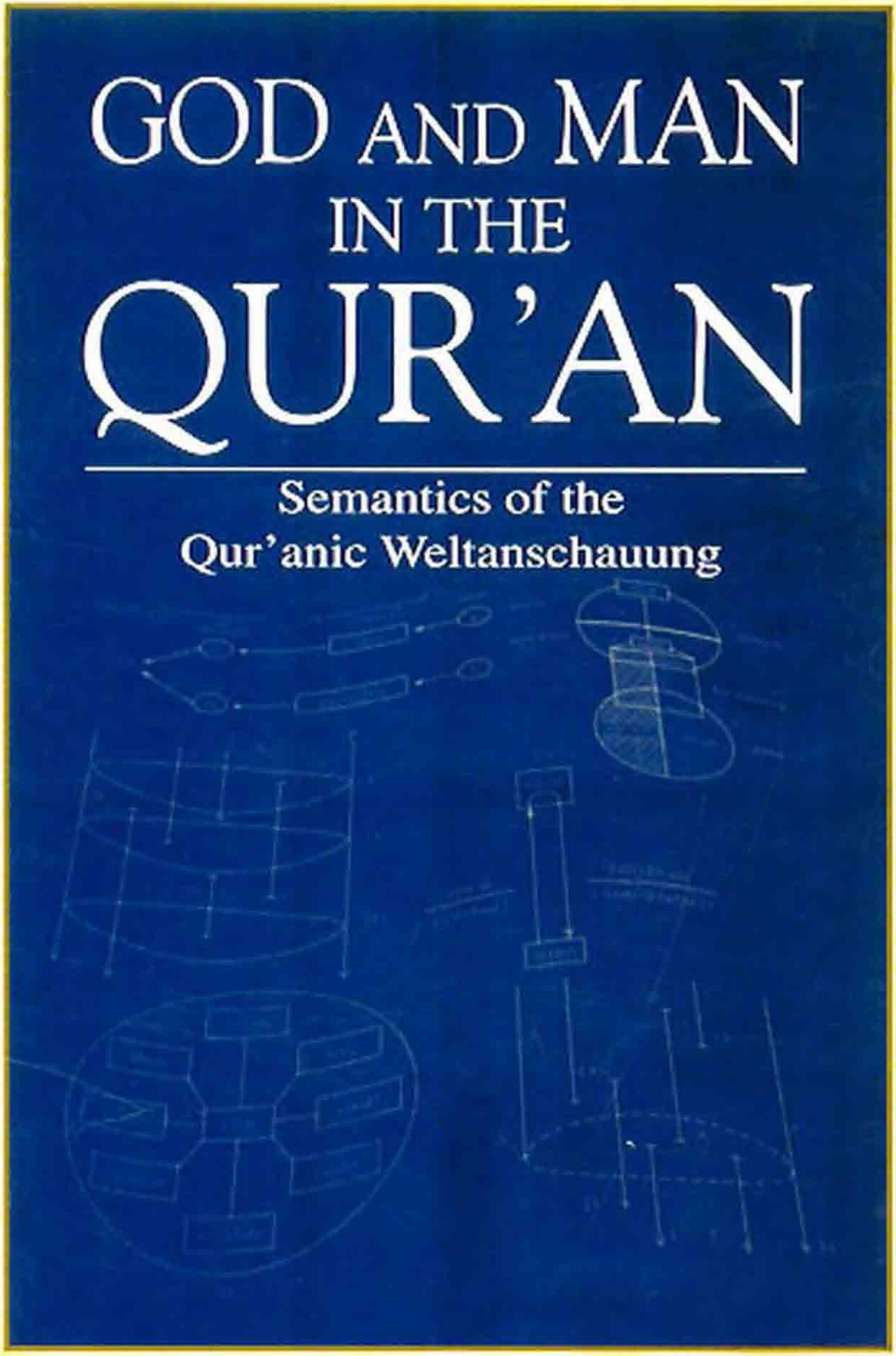
GOD AND MAN IN THE QUR'AN

Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung



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Review by Fazlur Rahman*

This book, which constitutes volume V of the series *Studies in the Humanities and Social Relations* of Keio University is written by Professor Toshihiko Izutsu and has emerged out of his lectures at McGill University, Montreal in the spring of 1962 and 1963. Actually, I participated in a seminar given by Dr. Izutsu at McGill during the 1960-61 session where he had tried out some of the ideas contained in this book. These seem to have matured over the years and this constitutes not only a welcome addition to the existing literature on Islam but introduces a new approach to the understanding of Islam—particularly by non-Muslims—the linguistic approach. The Arabic mistakes that appear in the book (some of which must be sheer misprints which are also frequent in the book) must not lead the reader to accuse the writer of inadequacy in Arabic which he knows and speaks fluently. Nor is this Dr. Izutsu's first work on the Qur'an, he has already given us a work on the ethical concepts of the Holy Book.

At the outset, Dr. Izutsu gives us his idea of the science of linguistics or semantics through which he wishes to understand the Qur'an, "Semantics as I understand it is an analytic study of the key-terms of a language with a view to arriving eventually at a conceptual

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* *Islamic Studies*, June 1966, Vol. V No. 2, Islamic Research Institute, Rawalpindi.

grasp of the *weltanschauung* or world-view of the people who use that language ...".

A semantical study of the Qur'an would, therefore, be an analytical study of the key-terms of the Qur'an. In the succeeding pages, Dr. Izutsu makes it abundantly clear that by a study of the key-terms is not merely meant just a mechanical analysis of these terms or concepts in isolation or as static units but even more importantly includes their living, contextual import, as they are used in the Qur'an. Thus, although the term *Allāh* was used by some pre-Islamic Arabs not only to mean a deity among deities but even a supreme deity in hierarchy of deities, yet the Qur'an wrought a most fundamental change in the *weltanschauung* of the Arabs by precisely changing the contextual use of this term, by charging it with a new import—and that by eliminating all deities and bringing the concept of Allah to the centre of the circle of being. In order, therefore, to understand and even to find out the key-concepts themselves, one must know first of all the entire basic structure of the Qur'anic world of ideas. A portrayal of this basic structure or total *Gestalt* is then attempted in chapter 3 for, "The proper position of each individual conceptual field, whether large or small, will be determined in a definite way only in terms of the multiple relations all the major fields bear to each other within the total *Gestalt*".

With this we also approach the basic dilemma of Dr. Izutsu's semantic methodology. The key-terms, which, when grasped, were supposed to yield an understanding of the system as a whole (for, Dr. Izutsu assures us that the "key-terms determine the system"), cannot themselves be understood and even fixed without a prior knowledge of that system. This is what is called a vicious circle. There is nothing basically vicious with the approach (which is, indeed, a common-sense approach) that the best way of understanding a system is to study that system (in the present case the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*) as a whole and to pay special attention to its important concepts. I, therefore, must suspect that viciousness is the result of the desire to make semantics a science and to make grandiose claims on behalf of it.

From an Islamic point of view, however, this is only a formal difficulty; we shall now briefly see what constitutes for Dr. Izutsu

the substantive structure of this Qur'anic teaching. This teaching our author discovers in the first place in a fourfold relationship between God and man. *viz.*, (i) God is the creator of man; (ii) He communicates His Will to man through Revelation; (iii) there subsists a Lord-servant relationship between God and man and (iv) the concept of God as the God of goodness and mercy (for those who are thankful to Him) and the God of wrath (for those who reject Him). The believers in this fourfold relationship between Allah and man constitute a Community (*Ummah Muslimah*) by themselves and believe in the Last Day, Paradise and Hell. Dr. Izutsu's description of the historical evolution of these concepts in pre-Islamic Arabia up to the appearance of Islam is quite rich and valuable.

The main question is whether the basic structure of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*, as described by Dr. Izutsu, really does adequately tally with the Qur'anic teaching. One cannot help thinking that the author has carefully and quite subjectively tailored this "basic structure" to fit what he himself has decided to be the "key-concepts" of the Qur'an. He may have thereby semi-consciously discovered in the Qur'an the counterparts of his personal religious *weltanschauung*. For, how else to explain the fact that in this total picture the moral element is totally wanting? Dr. Izutsu approvingly quotes Prof. Sir Hamilton Gibb to the effect that the main difference between the portrayals of Heaven and Hell by Umayyah Ibn Abī al-Ṣalt and by the Qur'an is that in the Qur'an they are "linked up with the essential moral core of the teaching". But apparently Dr. Izutsu does not understand the implications of Gibb's statement because he himself entirely ignores the moral field as though it forms no part of the "basic structure of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*". Indeed, while speaking of the "ethical relation" between God and man, Dr. Izutsu links up the ideas of salvation and damnation with purely personal faith.

One may raise the general question whether an ethical relationship, properly speaking, can be established at all between God and man. To God one can have only a *worshipful* attitude and not an *ethical* or *moral* attitude which he can have only towards other men, strictly speaking. One cannot be good to God but only to men. To a *weltanschauung* like Dr. Izutsu's, therefore, for which man-God relationships are imperturbable by and indifferent to man-man

relationships, and can be established *per se*, the Qur'anic teaching is directly opposed—far from being adequately described by that *weltanschauung*. That the Qur'an's chief aim is to create a moral-social order, is actually proved if one historically studies the process of the revelation of the Qur'an—the actual challenges which the Prophet flung initially to the Makkan society. These challenges were not only to the pantheon of the Makkans at the Ka'bah but also to their socio-economic structure. This shows the superiority of the historical approach to the approach of the pure semanticist.

Only a historical approach can also do justice to the evolution of concepts, particularly the concept *Allāh*. Dr. Izutsu, on the basis of certain verses of the Qur'an, thinks that the view of One God (Allah) generally prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia on the eve of Islam, was "surprisingly close in nature to the Islamic one". There is, however, strong evidence to believe that this "surprisingly" close concept of Allah was developed by the Makkans under the impact of the Qur'anic criticism and, on the basis of this newly evolved concept, they wanted to effect a compromise with the Prophet. The Qur'an itself bears testimony to this.

One big trouble with Dr. Izutsu's conception of the Qur'anic teaching on God-man relationship is that he does not keep the Makkan milieu in view and for him there is no difference between a Bedouin and a Makkan of the Prophet's time. The Bedouin was haughty, proud, unrestrained and boastful beyond any proper sense of reserve; he was over-conscious of his individual self-respect—he possessed the quality of *jahl* (opposed to *hilm*). The function of Islam, therefore, consisted, above all--according to him—by humbling this haughtiness and unlimited sense of pride. This was done effectively by projecting an idea of God, which is, above all, forbidding and fear-inspiring. The truth, however, is that the immediate addressees of the Qur'an were the Makkans—more particularly, their wealthy commercial classes. These people recognized no restraint on their amassing of wealth, did not recognize any obligations to their less fortunate fellow-men; regarded themselves "self-sufficient (*mustaghnī*)" *i.e.*, law unto themselves. It is to them that the Qur'an first threw its challenge and required them to recognize limitations on their "natural rights". It was until they had rejected the challenge that the Qur'an backed up its demand by a

theology with the doctrines of Heaven and Hell.

To make these criticisms, fundamental as they are, is not to deny the intrinsic value of this book which, according to this reviewer, lies in bringing out both the contrast and the continuity between the Qur'anic teaching and the post-Qur'anic developments in Islam at the hands of Muslims. On such vital issues as the definition of Islam and *Īmān* (chapter 2, section II) and the freedom of man *vis-à-vis* God (chapter 6), how Muslim speculative theology later deviated from the pre-speculative mood of the Qur'an has been incisively brought out. One wishes the author had shown more elaborately and decisively that the Qur'an, far from being a work of speculative thought interested in system building, was as a living monument of moral and spiritual guidance, interested in keeping alive all the moral tensions which are requisite for good and fruitful life. It is because the Qur'an is interested in *action* that it is not shy of putting side by side the contradictory and polar terms of the moral tension. But probably the preoccupation of Dr. Izutsu to build out a *system* himself from the Qur'an did not allow him to do so.

Dr. Izutsu's treatment of the question of *waḥy* or verbal communication from God in chapter 7 is good and comprehensive, although it is somewhat uncritical in the acceptance of traditional material on the subject and also naive in its interpretation. We are told that the verbal communication can occur only between two beings of the same order of existenee—which is, of course correct. But then Dr. Izutsu tries to rationalise as to how the Prophet could have actually heard Words of Revelation and he tells us that the Prophet in his moments of Revelation, was *transformed* into a higher being "against his nature". He does not see that this in fact explains nothing for the question still would remain. How is it possible for a being of one order to get altogether transformed—even against his own nature—from time to time, into a being of a different order and how, after the moments of Revelation have passed and the Prophet returns to his normal self, would he keep his identity? On the whole Dr. Izutsu's use of the terms "nature" and "supernatural" in this context clearly smacks of the Christian doctrines about Jesus. The author's differentiation of the Biblical concept of Prophecy and the Qur'anic concept is again very good. I would like to add that the Prophecy of the biblical Prophets was not always natural but was often an art

cultivated in the Jewish temples.

In the end, one would like to underline the fact that this book is from the pen of the first serious Asian non-Muslim scholar and a Japanese. As such we welcome Dr. Izutsu's work and hope that it will be the harbinger of a growing tradition of Islamic scholarship in the Far East.

Fazlur Rahman

Preface

The present work is based on a course of lectures which I gave at the Institute of Islamic Studies in McGill University, Montreal, in the spring of 1962 and 1963 at the request of Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, then Director of the Institute. I wish at the outset to express my cordial thanks to him for giving me the opportunity and encouragement to put into coherent form the results of many years of work on both the problems of semantical methodology and those of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* viewed from the standpoint of semantics.

The lectures are not reproduced here as originally delivered. I expanded them considerably and arranged the matter in a different order. In so doing I was guided by a hope that, although so many competent scholars had already studied the Qur'an from many different angles, I might still be able to contribute something new to a better understanding of the Qur'anic message to its own age and to us.

It remains to express my gratitude to all those who helped in various ways to make the production of this book possible: first, to the Rockefeller Foundation, the Humanities Division, under whose kind and cordial auspices I could undertake an extended two years' study tour of the Muslim world (1959-1961); secondly, to all those who attended my seminars at the Institute in Canada and contributed toward making me clarify my thought by their lively questions and valuable comments; and last but not least, to Professor Nobuhiro

Matsumoto, to whose guidance and unfailing sympathy this work owes much more than I can express.

My colleague Mr. Takao Suzuki, read through the manuscript and made a number of valuable suggestions. He helped me also with the proof-reading.

It is also my pleasant duty to acknowledge my great obligation to Dr. Shohei Takamura, President of Keio University for the subsidy generously granted by the University (Fukuzawa Endowment for the Advancement of Learning and Study) toward the publication of this book.

T. Izutsu
Tokyo, September 1963.

CHAPTER 1

Semantics and the Qur'an

I. Semantics of the Qur'an

This book which is actually entitled *God and Man in the Qur'an* might as well have been entitled in a more general way "Semantics of the Qur'an". I would have done so readily if it were not for the fact that the main part of the present study is almost exclusively concerned with the problem of the personal relation between God and man in the Qur'anic world-view and is centered round this specific topic. The alternative title would have the advantage of showing from the very beginning the two particular points of emphasis which characterize this study as a whole: semantics on the one hand and the Qur'an on the other.

In fact, both are equally important for the particular purpose of the present study; if we should neglect either of the two, the whole work would immediately lose its significance. For what is of vital importance here is neither the one nor the other considered separately, but this very combination itself. The combination suggests that we are going to approach a particular aspect of the Qur'an from a no less particular point of view. And, we must remember, the Qur'an is capable of being approached from a number of different points of view such as theological, philosophical, sociological, grammatical, exegetical, *etc.*, and the Qur'an presents a number of divergent but equally important aspects. So it is quite essential that we should try to have at the very outset the clearest possible idea as to the relevance of semantic methodology to Qur'anic studies, and to

see whether there is any real advantage in approaching the Scripture of Islam from this particular angle.

The title "Semantics of the Qur'an" would suggest, to begin with, that the work will consist primarily in our applying the method of semantical or conceptual analysis to material furnished by the Qur'anic vocabulary. Again this would suggest that of the two points of emphasis to which reference has just been made, semantics represents the methodological aspect of our work, and the Qur'an its material side. Both are, as I have said, of equal importance. But practically, that is, for the purposes of the present study, the former aspect is probably more important than the latter, for this book is addressed first and foremost to those readers who have already a good general knowledge of Islam and are, therefore, ready to get vitally interested from the beginning in the conceptual problems raised by this kind of study regarding the Qur'an itself, while nothing has been assumed on their part in regard to specialist knowledge of semantics and its methodology. So I am going to put in the first part of this book less emphasis on the material side than on the methodological aspect of our problem in order to bring home to Islamists the interest and value of having a new outlook on old problems.

Unfortunately, what is called semantics today is so bewilderingly complicated. It is extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible, for an outsider even to get a general idea of what it is like.[1] This is largely due to the fact that 'semantics', as its very etymology would suggest, is a science concerned with the phenomenon of *meaning* in the widest sense of the word, so wide, indeed, that almost anything that may be considered to have any meaning at all is fully entitled to constitute an object of semantics. And, in fact, 'meaning' in this sense is furnishing today with important problems thinkers and scholars working in most diverse fields of specialized study such as linguistics proper, sociology, anthropology, psychology, neurology, physiology, biology, analytic philosophy, symbolic logic, mathematics and, more recently, electronic engineering, and still others. So much so that 'semantics as the study of Meaning, cannot but be a new type of philosophy based on an entirely new conception of being and existence and extending, over many different and widely divergent branches of traditional science, which, however, are as yet far from

having achieved the ideal of a perfect integration.

Under these conditions it is but natural also that there should be in what is called semantics an all too obvious lack of harmony and uniformity. In other words, we have as yet no neatly organized uniform science of semantics, all we have in our hands is a number of different theories of Meaning. With a measure of exaggeration we might describe the situation by saying that everybody who speaks of semantics tends—rightly, we should think—to consider himself entitled to define and understand the word as he likes. This being the case, my first task in writing this book will have to consist in making an attempt to clarify my own conception of semantics, and to state as exactly as possible what I think should be the major concern of a semanticist, his ultimate aim and, in particular, his basic attitude along with an explanation of the methodological principles that derive from all this. This I will try to do in the following, not *in abstracto*, but in connection with some of the most concrete and profound problems raised by the language of the Qur'an.

As will be made abundantly clear as we proceed, semantics as I understand it is an analytic study of the key-terms of a language with a view to arriving eventually at a conceptual grasp of the *weltanschauung* or world-view of the people who use that language as a tool not only of speaking and thinking, but, more important still, of conceptualizing and interpreting the world that surrounds them. Semantics, thus understood, is a kind of *weltanschauungslehre*, a study of the nature and structure of the world-view of a nation at this or that significant period of its history, conducted by means of a methodological analysis of the major cultural concepts the nation has produced for itself and crystallized into the key-words of its language.

It will be easy to see now that the word Qur'an in our phrase "Semantics of the Qur'an" should be understood only in the sense of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*, or Qur'anic world-view, *i.e.*, the Qur'anic vision of the universe. The semantics of the Qur'an would deal mainly with the problem of how, in the view of this Scripture, the world of Being is structured, what are the major constituents of the world, and how they are related to each other. It would, in this sense, be a kind of ontology—a concrete, living and dynamic ontology, and not the kind of static systematic ontology constituted by a philosopher at an abstract level of metaphysical thinking. It

would form an ontology at the concrete level of being and existence as reflected in the verses of the Qur'an. It will be our purpose to bring out of the Qur'an this type of living dynamic ontology by examining analytically and methodologically the major concepts, that is, those concepts that seem to have played a decisive role in the formation of the Qur'anic vision of the universe.[2]

II. Integration of Individual Concepts

At first sight the task would appear to be quite a simple one. All we have to do, one might think, will be to pick up out of the whole vocabulary of the Qur'an all the important words standing for important concepts like *Allāh*, *Islām*, *nabiy* (prophet), *īmān* (belief), *kāfir* (infidel) *etc., et.*, and examine what they mean in the Qur'anic context. The matter, however, is not in reality so simple, for these words or concepts are not simply there in the Qur'an, each standing in isolation from others, but they are closely interdependent and derive their concrete meanings precisely from the entire system of relations. In other words, they form among themselves various groups, large and small, which, again, are connected with each other in various ways, so that they constitute ultimately an organized totality, an extremely complex and complicated network of conceptual associations. And what is really important for our particular purpose is this kind of conceptual system which is at work in the Qur'an rather than individual concepts as such taken separately and considered in themselves apart from the general structure, or *Gestalt*, as we might call it, into which they have been integrated. In analysing the individual key concepts that are found in the Qur'an we should never lose sight of the multiple relations which each of them bears to others in the whole system.

The supreme importance of such a conceptual network or total *Gestalt* underlying the world-view of the Qur'an will be brought home by examining even cursorily a few examples taken almost at random. We may begin by observing that none of the key-terms that play a decisive role in the formation of the Qur'anic world-view including the very name of God *Allāh*, was in any way a new coinage. Almost all of them had been in use in some form or other in pre-Islamic times. When the Islamic Revelation began to use these

words, it was the whole system, the general context in which they were used that struck the Makkan polytheists as something quite strange, unfamiliar and, therefore, unacceptable, and not the individual words and concepts themselves.

The words themselves were in current use in the 7th century, if not within the narrow confines of the mercantile society of Makkah, at least in some religious circle or other in Arabia; only, they belonged in different conceptual systems. Islam brought them together, combined them all into an entirely new hitherto unknown conceptual network. And it was chiefly—I do not say exclusively, for, undoubtedly there were a number of other factors at work—this transposition of concepts, and the fundamental displacement and rearrangement of moral and religious values which ensued from it, that so radically evolutionized the Arab conception of the world and human existence. From the viewpoint of a semanticist who is interested in the history of ideas, it is this, and no other thing, that gave the Qur'anic vision of the universe so markedly characteristic a coloring.

Speaking in more general terms, it is common knowledge that words, when they are taken out of their traditionally fixed combinations and put into an entirely different and new context, tend to be profoundly affected by that very transposition. This is known as the impact of context on word-meanings. Sometimes the impact results only in subtle shifts of emphasis and slight changes of nuance and emotive evocation. But more often there occur drastic changes in the meaning structure of the words. And this holds true even when the word in question in the new system still keeps hold on the same basic meaning which it had in the old system.

Now to give some examples from the Qur'an. The name of *Allāh*, for instance, was not at all unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs. This is evidenced by the fact that the name appears not only in pre-Islamic poetry and compound personal names but also in old inscriptions. At least some people or some tribes in Arabia believed in a god called *Allāh* and even seem to have gone to the extent of acknowledging Him as the creator of heaven and earth, as is easy to see from some of the Qur'anic verses.[3] Among people of this type even the highest position seems to have been assigned to *Allāh* in the hierarchy of polytheism, namely in the capacity of the "Lord of the House", *i.e.*, the Ka'bah at Makkah, the other gods being regarded as

so many mediators between this supreme God and human beings. This latter conception of the divine hierarchy most clearly reflected in the Qur'an. In Sūrah al-Zumar, we hear some polytheists saying:

﴿ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلاَّ لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَى﴾

We only serve them (i.e. worship other gods) that they may bring us near to Allah.

Al-Zumar, 39:4 [3][4]

The underlying idea is that of *shafā'ah* (intercession) which plays an exceedingly important role in the history of religious thought among the Arabs and Muslims from the old pre-Islamic times down to the Middle Ages when it comes to occupy the attention of the Islamic theologians.

In much the same sense, in Sūrah al-Aḥqāf, the gods besides Allah are regarded as *qurbān*, lit. means of approaching, that is, propitiation and intercession. There, in reference to those ancient cities that went to destruction as a result of their stubborn refusal to believe in Allah, it is asked with biting sarcasm:

﴿فَلَوْلاَ نَصَرَهُمُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ قُرْبَانًا ءَالِهَةً﴾

Why, then, did they not help those people, the gods that they had taken to themselves besides Allah as propitiators?

Al-Aḥqāf, 46:27 [28]

These and many other verses show clearly that the existence of a god called Allah and even his highest position among the divinities was known and acknowledged in *Jāhiliyyah*, but He was, after all, but one of the gods. This age-old system of religious values was gravely endangered when it was proclaimed by the Prophet of Islam that this supreme God was not only supreme in the relative sense of the highest in the hierarchy but *absolutely* supreme, and also unique, *i.e.*, the one and only God in existence, degrading thereby all other gods to the position of *bāṭil* (false) as opposed to *ḥaqq* (real), in other words, mere names without any reality, mere products of fancy and imagination. If the Arabs were to accept this new teaching, the general situation would have to suffer a complete change and repercussions would not only make themselves felt in the relatively

confined domain of religious ideas but practically all spheres of life, both social and individual, would have to be thereby, affected. No wonder formidable opposition to this movement under Muḥammad, began to manifest itself immediately and grew around him.

It is to be noticed that this did not mean a mere change in the Arab conception of the nature of Allah alone; it meant also a drastic and radical change of the whole conceptual system about which we talked in the preceding section. The new Islamic conception of the supreme God affected profoundly the whole structure of the vision of the universe. For the first time in the history of the Arabs, a monotheistic and theocentric system was established, a system whose center was occupied by the one and only God as the sole source of all human actions, and, indeed, of all forms of being and existence. All the existent things and values were thereby subjected to a complete rearrangement and a new allotment. The elements of the universe came, without one single exception, to be uprooted from their old soil, and transplanted into a new field; each one of them was assigned a new place, and new relationships were established between them. Concepts that had formerly been quite foreign to each other were now brought into close connections; contrariwise, concepts that had been closely related to each other in the old system came to be separated in the new one.

In the realm of the supernatural beings, the acknowledgment of the position of Allah as the sole Lord of the whole universe deprived, as noted above all the other so-called gods (*ālihah)* of all reality. They were now "mere names", not corresponding to any real entities existing outside of language. In the terminology of modern semantics, we should say that in this conception the term *ilāh* (pl. *ālihah*), when applied to anything other than Allah Himself is nothing but a word having connotation but no denotation.

In Sūrah Yūsuf, we read:

﴿مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِهِ إِلاَّ أَسْمَاءً سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنتُمْ وَءَابَاؤُكُم مَّا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلْطَانٍ﴾

That which you worship apart from Him, is nothing but names you have named, yourselves and your fathers. God has sent down no authority[5] *touching them.*

Yūsuf, 12:40

Besides the so-called gods, there were also in *Jāhiliyyah* a few other types of supernatural beings that were worshipped, feared and venerated in varying degrees according to places and tribes: angels, demons and *jinn*. These were all taken up and incorporated in the new system of Islamic world-conception, but with some fundamental modifications with regard to their respective position and function in the general scheme.

Of the important category of *jinn* we shall have much to talk later in connection with the problem of Revelation and poetic inspiration.[6] Here let us consider, as a typical example, the case of the angel-worship in ancient Arabia. According to informations obtainable from the *Hadīth*, there seems to have been widely practised among the Arabs in *Jāhiliyyah* the angel-worship. The Qur'an itself tells us that there were many who believed and professed that the angels were the daughters of Allah. The word *malāk* or *malak* meaning 'angel' was well-known not only among the town dwellers who might have been easily influenced in this respect by Judaism and the Persian religious conception, but also among the pure Bedouins. The famous pre-Islamic warrior poet 'Antarah b. Shaddād, for example, has this verse:[7]

فَسْئَلْ بِمَا شَهِدَتْ عَلَيْكَ فَوَارِسِي ... مَلَكَ الْمَوْتِ حَاضِرٌ لَا يَغِيبُ

(Ask any experienced warrior in our tribe;) he will tell you that on the edge of my sword there lives the angel of death, always present, never disappearing.

In the Arab conception, an angel was an invisible spiritual being somewhat in the nature of a god or superior *jinni*, worthy to be venerated and even worshipped, but with no definite place in the hierarchy of the supernatural beings. Sometimes an angel was venerated as an intercessor or mediator between a higher god and men, but often he was himself an object of cult and worship. To this conception Islam brought a profound change of far-reaching consequence for the *weltanschauung* of the Arabs. With the establishment of an entirely new theocentric system, a definite place was assigned to the angels in the hierarchy of beings. Moreover, the angels themselves were classified into several categories in accordance with their functions and thus angelic hierarchy was formed within the universal hierarchy of being. Some names came to

assume a great importance being associated with some especially important missions to fulfil in the execution of the grand design of Divine Providence; such is, for example, the angel Gabriel (*Jibrīl* or *Jabrīl* in Arabic) as the heavenly messenger who is charged with the task of transmitting the words of Revelation to the Prophet on the earth.

More important still, the angels ceased to be themselves an object of adoration and worship; now they were but simple creatures of God, differing in no way from human beings in this respect, and they were naturally so made exactly as men were, to worship God, to be humble and obedient servants of God. In Sūrah 4, we are told:

﴿لَّن يَسْتَنكِفَ الْمَسِيحُ أَن يَكُونَ عَبْدًا لِّلَّهِ وَلَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ وَمَن يَسْتَنكِفْ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَيَسْتَكْبِرْ فَسَيَحْشُرُهُمْ إِلَيْهِ جَمِيعًا﴾

The Messiah will never disdain to be a servant of God, nor will those angels who are allowed to enjoy Divine favor. Whoever disdains to serve Him as a slave, being too proud (to do so), He will assemble them to Him, all together.

An-Nisā', 4:170-171 [172]

Thus we see the angels, without ceasing to be celestial beings belonging to higher ontological order than mankind, degraded to the position of mere servants or slaves of Allah in much the same way as ordinary human beings. And if this is the case with the angels how much more should this be the case with *jinn*. These have also been originally and essentially created to serve and worship Allah; there can be no difference at all in this important respect between *jinn* and human beings. In Sūrah 51, Allah Himself declares:

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

I created jinn and mankind only that they might serve Me.

Al-Dhāriyāt, 51:56

And the verse is well-known[8] in which it is solemnly declared that those the *jinn* who disobey Allah and refuse to serve Him will be thrown into hell on the Day of Judgment together with human *kuffār* (infidels) without any discrimination.

It is to be noticed that all these are but a small part of the

universal rearrangement of concepts and redistribution of values brought about by the teaching of Islam, which radically altered the nature of the Arab conception of the world. We must observe that the words have not changed in their original basic meanings; what has actually changed is the general plan, the general system, and in this new system each one of them has found a new position. The word *malāk*, for example, still retains the old meaning of 'angel', and yet in this new system, it is no longer what it has been; it has undergone a subtle but very profound inner semantic transformation as a result of its having been put in a new place in a new system.

The impact of a new conceptual framework on the meaning structure of individual concepts will come out much more clearly if we turn to words that stand for moral, ethical or religious values. In the nature of the case, the Qur'an abounds in excellent examples in this field. We may mention as the most typical one the word *taqwā*. As we shall see later,[9] the basic semantic core of a living being of the word *taqwā* was in *Jāhiliyyah* "self-defensive attitude of a living being, animal or man, against some destructive force coming from outside". This word comes into the Islamic system of concepts carrying with it this very basic meaning. But there, under the overwhelming influence of the whole system, and particularly by the fact of its having been now put into a specific semantic field composed of a group of concepts having to do with 'belief' which is peculiar to the Islamic monotheism, it comes to acquire an extremely important religious meaning: *taqwā*, passing through the intermediate stage of "the pious fear of Divine chastisement on the Day of Judgment", ends by meaning personal 'piety' pure and simple.

A great many examples may be easily adduced to illustrate the same process of semantic transformation from different angles. But it is not necessary to do so at this stage, for, after all, that precisely will be the most important subject, of this whole study, and will, therefore, continue to occupy us all through the book. So instead of going any further in this direction, I should like to stop here for a while and add some general observations on what I have called the whole conceptual system or network from a somewhat more technical point of view.

III. 'Basic' Meaning and 'Relational' Meaning

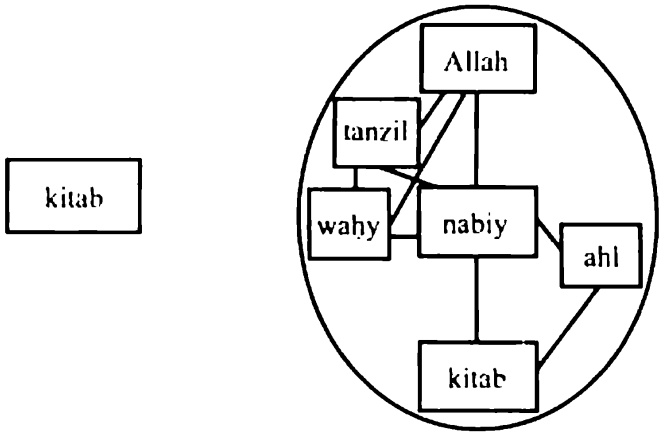
By the brief and summary explanation I have just given, the significance of a whole conceptual framework, or total *Gestalt*, has been, I hope, made apparent in affecting the meaning values of individual words that exist in totality. Concepts, we have seen, do not stand alone and in isolation but are always highly organized into a system or systems.

At this stage I should like to introduce a technical distinction between what I would call 'basic' meaning and 'relational' meaning as one of the major methodological concepts of semantics in order to facilitate our subsequent analytic work.

Now if we take up the Qur'an and examine from our standpoint the key-terms that we meet with therein, we notice immediately two things, one quite obvious and, apparently, even too banal and commonplace to be pointed out, and another which may not be so obvious at the first glance. The obvious side of the matter is that each individual word, taken separately, has its own basic meaning or conceptual content on which it will keep its hold even if we take the word out of its Qur'anic context. The word *kitāb* (book), for example, means basically the same thing whether it is found in the Qur'an or outside of the Qur'an. This word, as long as it is actually felt by the speech community to be one word, keeps its fundamental meaning—in this case, a very general and non-specified meaning of 'book'—wherever it is found, whether it happens to be used as a key-term in a given system of concepts or more generally outside of that particular system. This constant semantic element which remains attached to the word wherever it goes and however it is used, we may call the 'basic' meaning of the word.

This, however, does not exhaust the meaning of the word. And here begins the second aspect of word-meaning to which reference has just been made. In the Qur'anic context, the word *kitāb* assumes an unusual importance as the sign of a very particular religious concept surrounded by a halo of sanctity. This comes from the fact that in this context the word stands in a very close relation to the concept of Divine Revelation, or rather various concepts having direct reference to Revelation. This means that the simple word *kitāb*, with its simple basic meaning 'book', once introduced into a particular system and given a certain definite position in it, acquires a lot of

new semantic elements arising out of this particular situation, and also out of the various relations it is made to bear to other major concepts of that system. And, as happens very often, the new elements tend gravely to affect and even modify essentially the original meaning structure of the word. Thus in this case, the word *kitāb*, as soon as it is introduced into the Islamic conceptual system, is put into a close connection with such important Qur'anic words as *Allāh*, *wahy* (revelation), *tanzīl* (sending down, of Divine words), *nabiy* (Prophet), *ahl* (people; in the particular combination of *ahl al-kitāb*—the people of the Scripture—meaning peoples who possess a Book of Revelation like the Christians and the Jews, *etc.*).



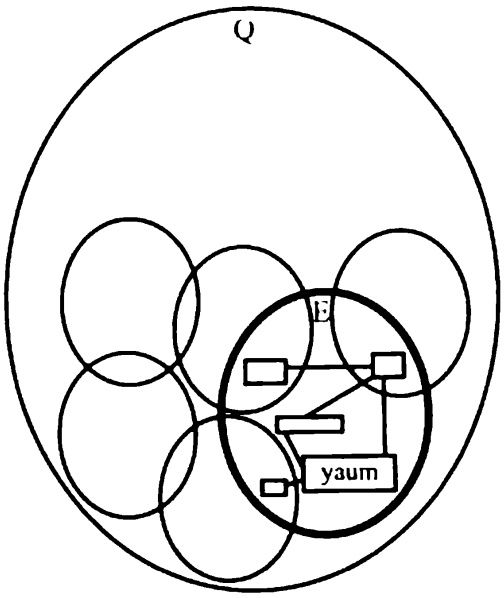
A—the word kitāb in an ordinary context showing the basic meaning of 'book' pure and simple.
B—the same word kitāb in the semantic field of Revelation peculiar to the Qur'an.

Henceforward, the word in the characteristically Qur'anic context will have to be understood in terms of all these related terms and this association alone gives the word *kitāb* very special semantic coloring, that is, very complex and particular meaning structure which it would never have acquired if it remained outside of this system. It is to be noticed that this is also part of the meaning of the word *kitāb* as long as it is used in the Qur'anic context—an exceedingly important and essential part of its meaning, indeed, far more important than the 'basic' meaning itself. This I would call in this book, the 'relational' meaning of the word to distinguish it from the latter.

Thus, while the 'basic' meaning of a word is something inherent in the word itself, which it carries with it wherever it goes, the 'relational' meaning is something connotative that comes to be

attached and added to the former by the word's having taken a particular position in a particular field, standing in diverse relations to all other important words in that system.

In view of the great methodological importance of this concept, I should like to give here another simple example showing how a 'relational' meaning comes into being. The word I have in mind is *yawm* whose 'basic' meaning is 'day'.



Let us suppose that the big circle (Q) in the diagram represents the whole Qur'anic vocabulary. This Q is, as we shall see in detail presently, a large conceptual system consisting of a number of smaller overlapping conceptual systems which we call in semantics 'semantic fields'. Among them there is a 'field' which is of especial importance in determining the nature of the Qur'anic world-view, a field, that is, composed of words having direct reference to the Resurrection and the Last Judgment, like *qiyāmah* (resurrection), *ba'th* (raising, the dead), *dīn* (Last Judgment), *ḥisāb* (reckoning), *etc.* This field or conceptual network constituted by these words we may call the Eschatological field (E).

As is natural, an intense atmosphere of a very unusual nature pervades the whole field and reigns over it. Right into this atmosphere you put the word *yawm* with its proper-neutral, we might say meaning of a 'day', which it has in normal situations; at once you see a variety of conceptual associations formed around it, and the concept of 'day' tinged with a marked eschatological coloring. In short, *al yawm* (the day) means in this particular field not an ordinary

day, but the Last Day, *i.e.*, the Day of Judgment. Exactly the same explanation applies to the Qur'anic use of the word *sā'ah*[10] whose basic meaning is 'hour'. In order to be understood in the sense of the 'Hour of Resurrection', the word need not actually occur in special combinations with other words that have more explicitly eschatological associations; the word *sā'ah* by itself is quite sufficient to convey all the necessary eschatological implications if only we know that it is being used not in its basic meaning, but in a sense which is peculiar to this semantic field.

It often happens that the modifying power of the whole system works upon the word so strongly that the latter ends by almost losing its original conceptual meaning. When this happens, then we have a different word; in other words, we are witnessing the birth of a new word. The outstanding example is the semantic transformation which the verb *kafara* underwent in the Qur'an.

Kafara properly and basically means "to be ungrateful", "to show ingratitude" towards some good done or some favor shown by some other person; it is just the opposite of *shakara* meaning "to be thankful". And this is the usual meaning of the verb *kafara* within the larger context of the vocabulary of the Arabic language. This meaning itself does not change in any way whether the verb be used by the Muslims or by the non-Muslim Arabs; it is common to all the Arabic speaking people. Moreover, this has been so all through the ages from pre-Islamic times down even to our own days.

However, the word took quite a special course within the narrower context of Islamic theology. At the Qur'anic stage of the development of the Arabic language, the word was taken over from the pre-Islamic vocabulary by Divine Revelation and put into an extremely important semantic field composed of words having reference to the central concept of 'belief', namely, belief in God. A direct and most intimate conceptual connection was thereby established between this verb and the word *Allāh*. That is to say, within this narrowly confined semantic field—which we might call the *īmān*-field, *īmān* being roughly equivalent in meaning to 'belief', as we shall see more full later—*kafara* was no longer the simple attitude of ingratitude, but was ingratitude towards God, or more exactly, towards God's goodness and the favour shown by Him. And this is the first stage in the very interesting semantic development of this word in the Qur'anic context.

In order to understand the next stage we must remember the very basic fact about Islam that, according to the religious teaching of the Qur'an itself, one of the essential conditions, or rather, the very first step in attaining to the true 'belief' or 'faith' (*īmān*) is that man should learn to understand the seemingly quite ordinary and common natural phenomena which he observes around him not as simple *natural* phenomena but as so many manifestations of Divine goodness towards him—that is, in Qur'anic terminology, as so many 'signs' (*āyāt*) of God—and be truly thankful to Him for them. The Qur'an, never tires of insisting most emphatically and trying to bring home to man how all the good things which he is enjoying in this earthly life are in reality nothing but God's gifts. Islam as a religion is, in this respect, an exhortation to gratitude towards God. At the same time it is an exhortation addressed to man to become deeply conscious of his ultimate and essential dependence on God. In the religious view of the Qur'an this consciousness on the part of man of his absolute dependence on God is the very beginning of the true faith and belief in God. This explains how the verb *kafara*—or its nominal form *kufr* deviates little by little from the original meaning of 'ingratitude' and comes nearer and nearer to the meaning of 'disbelief' or 'unbelief' as the flat negation of the concept of *īmān*. In the Qur'anic verses that were revealed to Muhammad towards the end of his lifetime, *kafara* was no longer the antonym of *shakara* (be thankful) but rather the opposite of *āmana* (to believe), and its participal form *kāfir*—this form, incidentally was destined to play a part of paramount importance in the subsequent history of Islamic thought, whether theological or political—came to mean simply an 'infidel'.[11] Correspondingly, the word *shakara*, on its part, comes very near to the concept of *īmān* itself. In not a few places in the Qur'an, *shakara* (to be thankful) to God is almost synonymous with *āmana* (to believe) in God, although, to be sure, the semantic transformation in this case has not been as complete as in the case of *kafara*.

In any case, here we see how word-meanings get affected by their neighbors, by the impact, that is, of the whole system to which they are made to belong. A word signifying 'thankfulness' could never have conceivably acquired a meaning coming near to 'belief' and 'faith' except by having been put into a particular semantic field, where all elements contributed towards letting it develop in that dire-

ction. And in terms of our distinction between 'basic' meaning and 'relational' meaning, we might describe fairly adequately the situation by saying that in the case of *shakara* a markedly characteristic relational meaning developed around the basic semantic core of the word in the Qur'an, which enabled the word to be used sometimes almost synonymously with *āmana*, while in the case of *kafara* "to be ungrateful" the relational meaning became powerful and got the upper hand of the basic meaning so much so that it eventually produced a new word with the basic meaning of 'disbelief'.

It remains now to say a word about the real nature of what I have called 'basic' meaning in distinction from the 'relational'. It must be kept in mind that the 'basic' meaning which, as I said, a word carries with it everywhere and always as its conceptual core or kernel, and which, therefore, does not change in whatever system the word may be put, as long as it is felt by the community to be one word—this 'basic' meaning is in reality but a methodological concept, that is to say, a theoretic postulate which proves useful whenever we want to analyze the meaning of a word scientifically, which, however, we never find in this abstract form in the world of reality. We only assume as a working hypothesis the existence of some such thing in our semantical analysis of words because in most cases the assumption facilitates our analytic procedure and makes our understanding of word-meanings more systematic and scientifically exact. To say the truth, words are all complex social and cultural phenomena, and in the world of reality even a single word cannot be found, whose concrete meaning is covered completely by what I call 'basic' meaning. All words without exception are more or less markedly tinged with some special coloring coming from the peculiar structure of the cultural milieu in which they actually exist.

IV. Vocabulary and *Weltanschauung*

The previous section was devoted to a consideration of a methodological distinction between two different, although closely related, sorts of word-meaning which we named provisionally 'basic' meaning and 'relational' meaning respectively. And we examined a few examples from the Qur'an. Our real aim was not so much to explain the distinction itself by concrete examples to show how

semantical analysis of the 'relational' side of a word-meaning requires a minute and careful investigation into the general cultural situation of the age and the people in addition to a more specialist linguistic knowledge of the word. For, after all, what we call the 'relational' meaning of a word is nothing other than a concrete manifestation, or crystallization, of the spirit the culture, and a most faithful reflection of the general tendency, psychology and otherwise, of the people who use the word as part of their vocabulary.

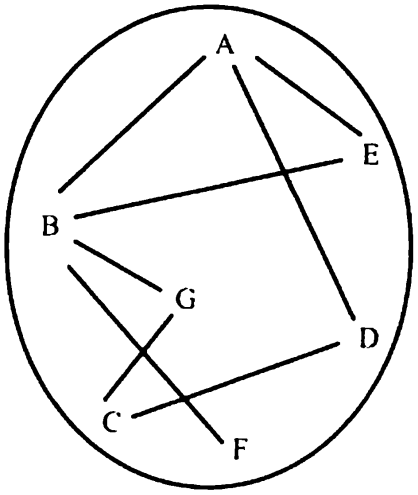
This, I think, has also shown that semantical analysis is neither a simple analysis of the formal structure of a word nor a study of the original meaning attached to the word-form, *i.e.*, etymology. Etymology, even when we are fortunate enough to know it, can only furnish us with a clue as to the 'basic' meaning of a word. And, we must remember, etymology in many cases remains a simple guess-work, and very often an insoluble mystery. Semantical analysis, in our conception, is something that intends to go far beyond that. It purports to be a cultural science, if we are to classify it. The analysis of the basic relational elements of a key-term should be conducted in such a way that, when we really succeed in doing it, the combination of the two aspects of the meaning would bring to light one particular aspect, one significant facet of culture as it was, or is, being experienced consciously by those belonging to that culture. And at the end, if we ever reach that final stage, all the analysis done must help us reconstruct on an analytic level the whole structure of the culture as it really lived—or lives, as the case may be—in the conception of the people. This is what I would call the 'semantic *weltanschauung*' of a culture.

It remains now to elucidate more in detail what kind of a thing this 'semantic *weltanschauung*' is, how it is basically constituted, and what grounds we can offer for maintaining that it forms philosophically a dynamic ontology to which a passing reference has earlier been made.

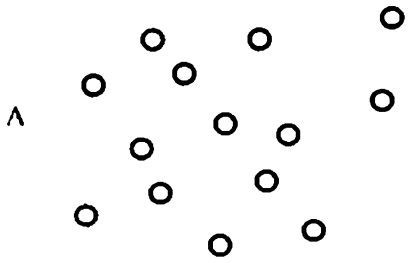
With this in view let us begin by repeating what we have already remarked, namely, that the words in a language form a closely-knit system. The main pattern of that system is determined by a certain number of particularly important words. It is necessary to note here that not all words in a vocabulary are of equal value in forming the basic structure of the ontological conception underlying the vocabulary, however important they may appear from other points of

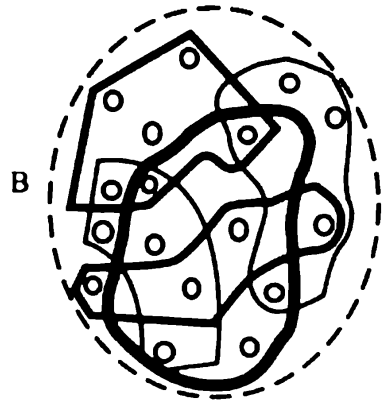
view. The word 'stone', for example, may be fairly important in the daily life of the English-speaking people. But the word, it would seem, does not play any decisive part in characterizing the world-view of the present day English language. In the same way, the word *qirṭās* meaning 'parchment' which occurs in the Sūrah al-An'ām[12] is indeed, a very interesting and remarkable word not only linguistically but also from the standpoint of the cultural history of the Arabs, but it does not contribute in any essential way towards characterizing the nature of the fundamental Qur'anic vision of the universe. The word *shā'ir* (poet) is several degrees more important than this, particularly in a negative sense, because the Qur'an is emphatic in pointing out to the opponents that the Prophet Muḥammad is "not a poet".[13] And yet, its importance, when compared with the word *nabiy* (prophet) itself, is very small. Those words that play a really decisive role in making up the basic conceptual structure of the Qur'anic world-view, I would call the 'key-terms' of the Qur'an. *Allāh, Islām, īmān* (faith), *kāfir* (infidel), *nabiy* (prophet), *rasūl* (apostle, of God) are some of the outstanding examples. It will be the most important, but also the most difficult part of a semanticist's job, who would study the Qur'an from this point of view, to isolate, before everything else, the key-terms out of the bulk of Qur'anic vocabulary. For it will determine all the subsequent analytic work he will be doing; this will doubtless form the very basis of the whole edifice.

Almost unavoidably a certain amount of arbitrariness comes into this choice of the key-terms, and this may gravely affect at least some aspect of the whole picture. Just to give one example: the Qur'an mentions more than ten times the Heavenly 'Throne', *'arsh* of Allah,[14] and we know that this concept occupies a very prominent place in the discussions of later theologians of Islam and that it plays also an exceedingly important role in Islamic mysticism as a symbol. But whether the concept is so fundamentally important already at the Qur'anic stage as to be fully entitled to be regarded as one of the key-terms will certainly be a question open to discussion. And the semanticist will have to be confronted with many similar cases in the course of his analysis. This, however, does not offer a real problem, for as regards, at least, the main body of key-terms there can possibly be no essential disagreement. Nobody will question the choice of words like *Islām īmān, kufr, nabiy, etc.*, not to speak of the word *Allāh* itself.



Now the key-terms constitute among themselves the general pattern the vocabulary of which they are representative members. And this they do by standing in diverse and multiple relations with each other. As I said earlier they do not exist quite independently of each other; they are connected with one another in a most intricate way and in diverse directions. Let *A, B, C, D, E, F* and *G* be the key-terms of a vocabulary. The word *A* with its own 'basic' meaning is closely related with *B, D* and *E*, for example. The word *B*, in its turn, itself having its proper 'basic' meaning has an intimate relationship with *E, F, G* besides *A*, and the word *G* with *C* and *B*, *etc., etc.* So that all, taken as a whole, represent themselves to our eyes as a highly organized system of interdependent elements, a network of semantic associations. And finally, all the words of the vocabulary are distributed along these main lines.





Thus we see that 'vocabulary' in this sense is not a mere sum total of words;[15] that is, it is not a mere haphazard collection of a great number of words lumped together without order and principle, each one of them standing by itself without any essential connection with others (*Picture A*). On the contrary, the words exist connected with each other in multiple relationships and thus form a number of largely overlapping areas or sectors (*Picture B*). These areas constituted by the various relations of words among themselves we may call 'semantic fields'.

Each semantic field represents a relatively independent conceptual sphere which is quite similar in nature to vocabulary. The difference between 'vocabulary' and 'semantic field' is obviously a relative one; essentially there can be no difference at all between them. For, after all, a 'semantic field' is no less an organized whole than 'vocabulary', because it is a whole body of words arranged in a meaningful pattern representing a system of concepts ordered and structured in accordance with a principle of conceptual organization. Vocabulary usually comprises a number of spheres, that is to say, vocabulary as a larger conceptual field is divided up into several particular fields. But each of the particular fields, as an organized sector of the vocabulary, is itself fully entitled to be called a 'vocabulary' if it is large enough to be treated as an independent unit. Only when we consider it as a particular part of a larger whole, do we distinguish it from the latter it a 'semantic field'. The latter, in this sense, is a system within a system, a sub-system.

Theoretically it would, then, be possible to consider even the Qur'anic vocabulary itself a particular 'field' within a still larger whole, the vocabulary of the Arabic language of that age. If we leave out of consideration—which, however, we should not do, practically—the tremendous cultural importance the vocabulary of the Qur'an in the history of Arabic, and adopt a strictly formal point of view, then the Qur'anic vocabulary is but a sub-system within a system. In any case, this seems to give us warning against ignoring the basic relationship it bears to other significant sections within the whole vocabulary of the Arabic language. Fortunately for us, something at least of these other sectors is known to us, chiefly through the language of pre-Islamic and *mukhaḍram* poetry,[16] which has come down to us thanks to the painstaking efforts of the great philologists of the Abbasid period. The pre-Islamic poets—and partly also the

mukhadram poets—share with the Qur'an a considerable amount of key-words, but their vocabulary and the underlying world-view are structured along essentially different lines from those of the Qur'an.

In these two major conceptual systems of old Arabia—the pre-Islamic and the Qur'anic—even the common elements belong as a rule in entirely different spheres of thought. And this simply means that one and the same word usually assumes a completely different semantic value according as it belongs in this system or that. And since, chronologically, the vocabulary of pre-Islam is antecedent to that of the Qur'an, a comparison between them will certainly be quite fruitful. It will, we might expect, cast an illuminating light on the original 'basic' meaning of some of the key-terms that are found in the Qur'an. It will further allow us to see exactly how new ideas arose and how old ideas were modified in Arabia in the critical period extending from the late *Jāhiliyyah* age to the first Islamic age, and observe how history acted upon and moulded the thought and life of the people. This is the main reason why in the following I shall constantly be referring to pre-Islamic poetry in explaining the semantic structure of the Qur'anic vocabulary.[17]

The above considerations have, I hope, made it sufficiently clear that vocabulary, far from being a single homogeneous plain, consists of a great number—or rather we should say, an indefinite number—of strata of associative connections or spheres of conceptual association, each one of which corresponds to a predominant interest of a community in a given period of history and thus epitomizes some aspect of its ideals, aspirations and preoccupations. Vocabulary, in short, is a multi-strata structure. And these strata are formed, linguistically, by groups of key-words, which we have named 'semantic fields'.

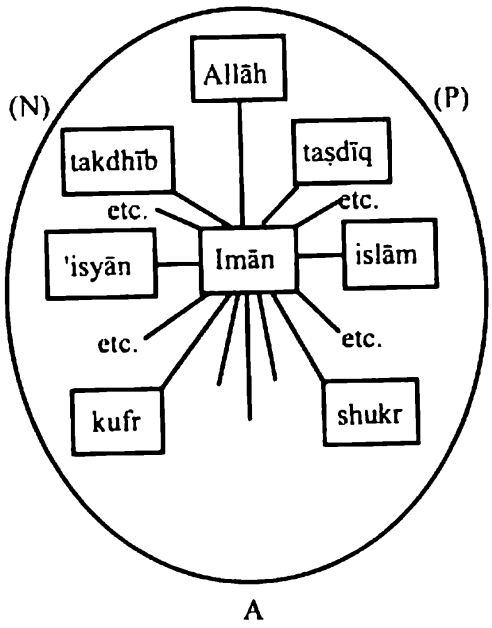
Our next task will be to investigate how individual 'semantic fields' are themselves structured in detail, and how it will be possible for us to detect one in midst of an extremely complicated whole of interlocking elements. Thus, to come back to our main topic in this chapter, which is nothing other than the semantics of the Qur'an, we shall have to begin by trying to isolate major conceptual spheres of the Qur'an, then we shall be engaged in discovering how these various spheres or semantic fields, large and small, area delimited by their neighbors, how they are related with one another, how they are

internally structured, and how they are organized and integrated into the largest multi-strata system, *i.e.*, that of the whole Qur'an, besides paying due attention to the particular structure of the meaning of each individual key-word.

At this point I must introduce another technical term—'focus-word'—corresponding to a new methodological concept which will prove very useful when we are engaged in isolating and analysing semantic fields. By 'focus-word' I would mean a particularly important key-word which indicates and delimits a relatively independent and distinctive conceptual sphere, *i.e.* 'semantic field' in our terminology, within the larger whole of vocabulary. A focus-word is, thus, an *arché* in the Aristotelian sense; it is that in terms of which a particular sub-system of key-words is set off and distinguished from the rest. It is the conceptual center of an important semantic sector of vocabulary, comprising a certain number of key-words.

Since all key-words are, by definition, important terms, it will be difficult for us to decide definitely as to which, of all the possible candidates for it, should be taken as the real 'focus' of the system. And here again we must admit the possibility of an element of arbitrariness coming into our choice. But this must not be allowed to make us blind to the methodological utility of such a concept. Besides, the situation is made less embarassing by the fact that the concept of 'focus-word' is, and must necessarily be, a fairly flexible one. If a certain word is made to act as a focus-word in a certain semantic field, that does not prevent the same word from behaving as an ordinary key-word in some other field or fields. And this reflects faithfully the real nature vocabulary, which, as I said above, is always and everywhere a multi-strata structure. This I will show now, in a preliminary way, by one or two simple examples.

The word *īmān* (belief)—with all the other words derived directly from the same root, like *āmana* (to believe), *mu'min* (believer)—for instance, plays in the Qur'an an exceedingly important part. Nobody will disagree to our regarding it as a focus-word governing a special field of its own. And as soon as we take it as a focus-word, we begin to see a certain number of other important words, that is, key-words, clustering about it as the conceptual article or focal point, thus forming together a significant conceptual sphere the whole vocabulary of the Qur'an (*Picture A.*). These key-words clustering about *īmān* are of either a positive (*P*) or a negative (*N*)



nature. On the positive side, we have among others, words like *shukr* (thankfulness; the verb *shakara*[18]), *Islām*, lit. "the giving over of one's self (to God)" (the verb *aslama*), *taṣdīq*, "considering (the revealed words) truthful" (the verb *ṣaddaqa*), *Allāh* (as the object 'belief'), *etc.* While the negative side of this conceptual network consists of words like *kufr* (disbelief), *takdhīb*, "giving the lie to (the revealed words)" (the verb *kadhdhaba*; *kadhib*: 'a lie'), *'iṣyān* (disobedience), and *nifāq* ("making a false show of belief"), *etc.*

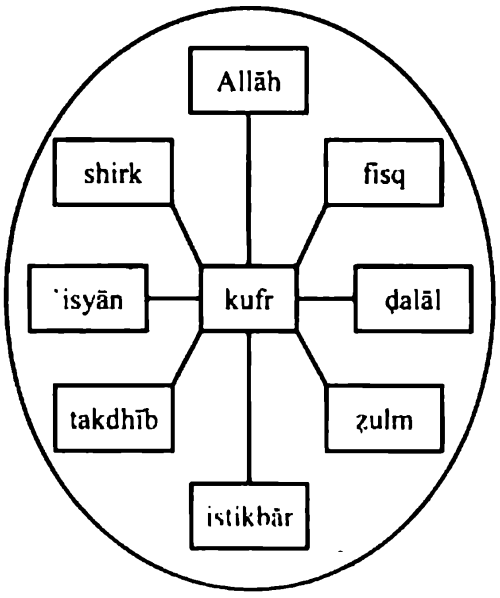
Thus a group of important words, *i.e.*, key-words, center around a word which represents and unifies the whole group, and constitute in this way a relatively independent field of concepts. If the word standing at the centre delimits the field in the gross and gives the main concept without any differentiation, the words centering around it point each in its own way, to this or that particular aspect of the main concept; they behave as the principle of differentiation while the focus-word works as the principle of unification. And the whole field constitutes by itself a small vocabulary within the larger vocabulary of the Qur'an, that is, a sub-system of concepts falling within a larger conceptual system. And this latter consists of a number of similarly structured sub-systems coexisting with each other.

This, however, does not yet give a true picture of the complex nature of system. The complexity of the matter arises from the fact that each of the words appearing in a sub-system, whether focus-word or key-word, does not remain confined within the limits of the particular field, but normally has a multiple relationship to many

other words that properly belong to other fields. The focus-word of a certain field may appear as one of the ordinary key-terms in another field; contrariwise, a word that belongs in a certain sphere in the capacity of a key-term may appear in another as its focus-word. Again, some words may be there that are common to two or more fields all in the capacity of simple key-words.

Thus, to give the most remarkable example, the word *Allāh* appears in semantic field of 'belief' which I have just mentioned, as a key-word along, with others centering around the focus-word *īmān*, because it is, in this particular connection, the grammatical object of *īmān-āmana bi-Allāh* ("to believe in God") being one of the standing expressions in the Qur'an. The reverse side, I mean, conceptual side of this is that God is here being taken account of in so far as is the object of faith. There are, however, several other points of view, which the word *Allāh* must admittedly be looked upon as an important focus-word that gathers around itself quite a number of key-words including *īmān* itself. To say the truth, the word *Allāh* is the highest focus-word in Qur'anic vocabulary, reigning over the entire domain. And this is nothing but the semantic aspect of what we generally mean by saying that the world of the Qur'an is essentially theocentric. We shall have occasion to come back to the point later.

Of the remaining key-words that appear in the same field, *Islām* undoubtedly is fully entitled to be considered a focus-word with its own semantic field. Likewise, the word *kufr* on the negative side. The rest, that is, words like *shukr*, *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb*, cannot possibly be given such a central position in any conceptual system in the Qur'an.



B

The semantic field of *kufr* (disbelief) may be shown by this diagram (*Picture B*). The diagram has been intentionally simplified by the elimination of all the negative elements, that is, those words which constitute the positive side of the diagram showing the semantic field of *īmān* (*Picture A*). All the key-words that surround the focus-word in this diagram are either those that signify partial and particular aspects of the concept itself of *kufr* or those that stand for concepts closely related to *kufr* in the Qur'anic context.[19]

As has been suggested above, the complexity of the whole system is greatly increased by the fact that, as a rule, one and the same key-word belongs, as key-word, in several different fields, forming in diverse spheres diverse semantical relations. Take for example the word *ḍalāl* in the semantic fields of *kufr*. *Dalāl* properly means "going astray" or "wandering off the right path", the verb being *dalla*. It is part of the most remarkable religious conception of the Qur'an that Allah shows to the mankind the "right way" to salvation but only some of them take that way and many go astray. In terms of the semantic field we are discussing now, *kufr* (disbelief) in God is precisely the necessary result of man's having chosen—or having been made to choose, as the case may be[20]—a wrong way instead of the only right one. In other terms, "disbelief" and "wandering from the right path" refer to exactly the same thing from two different angles. And it is in this capacity that the word *dalāl* has its proper place in the semantic field of *kufr*. But the point of interest is that this is not the only proper place assigned to the word *dalāl* in the whole system of the Qur'anic vocabulary, as we shall see presently.

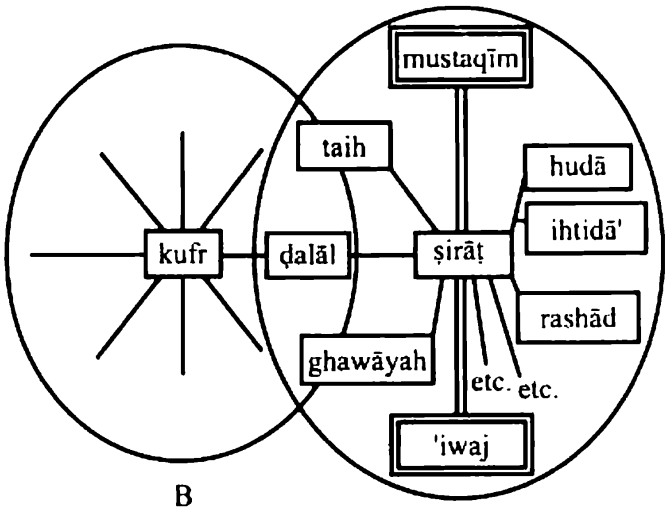
The concept of Way, *ṣirāt* or *sabīl*, plays a most prominent part informing the religious conception peculiar to the Qur'an. Even a casual reader will notice that the Qur'an from beginning to end is saturated with this idea. Most obviously *ṣirāṭ* or its synonym *sabīl* is the focus-word governing a whole semantic field composed of a big family of words, each one of which represents in its own way and from its peculiar point of view an essential facet of the Qur'anic thought. The key-words of this field may conveniently be classified under three major groups:

1. In the first place come those words standing for concepts that relate to the nature of the Way itself. The Qur'an looks at this problem from the point of view of its being straight (*mustaqīm*,

sawī, etc.) or crooked (*'iwaj, mu'wajj, etc*).

2. Concepts relating to man's choosing, or being guided to, the right way (*hudā, ihtidā, rashād, etc*).

3. Concepts of wandering off the right way (*ḍalāl, ghawāyah, taih, etc.*)



The diagram *C* gives, in a very simplified form, the structural framework in which various concepts relating to the central concept of Way are put together, showing in gross outlines how they are associated with each other in smaller groups which, again, are associated with each other in a positive or negative way, and finally integrated into the large semantic field of Way.

There is here something more important to remark. If we compare the diagram *C* with the diagram *B*—that of the semantic field of *kufr*—we will notice immediately that the word *ḍalāl* ("swerving from the right path") is common to both systems. In other terms, the same word belongs in exactly the same capacity of a key-term in two different conceptual systems. As a key-term, it fulfils the same basic function in both *B* and *C*, but the concrete role it plays varies widely accordingly as it is regarded as a member of one or the other system. *Ḍalāl* as a key-word of *kufr* appears in quite a different light from the same word functioning as a key-word of the field of *ṣirāt*, because its associations are different in each case. And yet, on the other hand, it is also true that the word *dalāl* does establish a connecting link between the two systems. Thus we see two major semantic fields of the Qur'an connected with each other in an extremely subtle but intimate way, without losing their relative

independence. Here, of course, I am intentionally simplifying the matter to the extreme degree, knowing that in many cases methodological over-simplication brings out better the fundamental structure of things. In reality, *ḍalāl* is not the only point of contact between *B* and *C*; there must be discoverable many other such points. But the essential thing about our present problem is to see that a key-word may appear in several semantic fields at the same time in the capacity of a key-word, playing a different part in each one of them and yet functioning as a connecting link between them.

This, in addition to the fact noted above that the focus-word of a semantic field may, and does often, make its appearance as an ordinary key-word in one or more other semantic fields, will give us a clear insight into the complexity of what is called 'vocabulary'. Vocabulary as the sum total of all the semantic fields will then be seen as a vast and intricate network of multiple relationship that hold between the words, corresponding to an organized whole of concepts related with each other in a myriad of associative interconnections. Such an organized whole of concepts symbolized by the vocabulary of the community, a total conceptual system, I would call 'Weltanshauung'—or, to distinguish it from other types of world-view obtainable by other methods, *e.g.* philosophical *weltans-chauung*—'*semantic weltanschauung*'.

It will have been observed that I have in what precedes always used the two terms 'conceptual system' and 'vocabulary' rather indiscriminately. This is due to the fact that the two, in my view, are but two different aspects of one and the same thing, that is, the linguistic is simply the other side of the conceptual. A 'concept', however it may be defined,[21] is in itself but an extremely elusive wooly thing, hard to grasp and always with a blurred outline. It begins to exist as an independent entity with a more or less fixed contour and stability only when it comes to be couched in a linguistic form, *i.e.*, a word. All concepts recognized and acknowledged as such in a given society in a given period of history tend, as a rule, to be linguistically fixed and stablized sooner or later and be thus given a tangible and relatively permanent form. Only then do they become entitled to be considered social entities in the real sense of the word, commonly open to all those who belong to the community. Theoretically, I do not in any way deny the possibility of the existence of 'pre-linguistic' concepts, but if they do exist, they lie

outside the limits of our scientific interest. Anyhow whenever I use the term 'concept' in this book I understand one having a definite word at its back. The same is true of the whole organized body of concepts, of which we have been talking. One and the same complex network of associations is, in its linguistic aspect, a 'vocabulary', and, in its conceptual aspect, a '*weltanschauung*'. And it is in this and only in this sense that we shall be interested, in the following, in the problem of semantic *weltanschauung* of the Qur'an.

It remains to say a word about the ultimate ideal which we shall have to pursue in carrying on this research. Since every system worthy of the name must have a patterning principle on which it is based, it would be natural to presume that, in our particular case too, not only each individual semantic field but the whole system of the Qur'anic concepts comprising within itself all the layers of associative connection is based on a pattern which is peculiar to the Qur'anic thought, *i.e.*, which makes the latter essentially different from all non-Qur'anic systems of concepts, whether Islamic or non-Islamic.[22]

To use the words of one of the outstanding pioneers of this kind of study, Edward Sapir, "there is such a thing as a basic plan, a certain cut" to each system. To isolate this fundamental plan, or as Sapir himself has named it, the "structural genius" governing the nature and working mechanism of the whole Qur'anic system must constitute the ultimate aim of a semanticist approaching this Scripture, as long as he understands the discipline of semantics as a cultural science. For only when we succeed in doing this, can we hope to succeed in bringing to light the *weltanschauung* of the Qur'an, which will, philosophically be nothing other than the very "Qur'anic ontology" to which we referred the beginning of this chapter.

All this is of course a mere ideal, which, we must admit, is practically very hard to attain, or even never to be attained. The present study as a whole is but a first and very modest step towards this ultimate goal.

Notes

1. For a well-balanced broad survey of the entire field covered by semantics together with a convenient brief presentation of the historical background, the reader is referred to Prof. Stephen Ullmann's work, *Semantics—An Introduction to the Science of Meaning*, Oxford, 1962.
2. In elaborating the idea of semantics as a kind of Weitanscbauungslebre I am greatly indebted to Prof. Leo Weisgerber of Bonn, who, since many years, has constantly emphasized the significance of human language as an intellectual process of world-formation (*Weltgestaltung*). For a brief but very impressive summary exposition of his thesis see his reef *Grundformen sprachlicher Weltgestaltung*, Köln u. Opladen, 1963. In many of the essential points his Humboldtian philosophy of language coincides perfectly with what is known today in the English-speaking world under the name of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. As regards this latter theory see a most lucid critical examination by Prof. Paul Henle in *Language, Thought and Culture*, Michigan, 1958, Chapter 1. To all appearance, these two schools have long been developing the same type of linguistic theory on both sides of the Atlantic without being acquainted with each other.
3. See later, Chapter 4, where the Qur'anic evidence concerning the pre-Islamic concept of *Allāh* is discussed in a more systematic way.
4. In quoting from the Qur'an, I give first Flügel's numbering of the verses and then that of the standard Egyptian edition (in brackets) whenever there happens to be discrepancy between the two.
5. *i.e.*, evidence showing that they are real.
6. See Chapter 7, section III.
7. 'Antarah: *Diwān*, ed. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, Cairo, p. 22. Here the poet is addressing his beloved girl 'Ablah. The concept of the angel of death plays a considerable role in Qur'anic eschatology. A number of important passages (e.g. VI, 93) describe how angels will come and seize the soul at the critical moment of the death-struggle and bring it before the Supreme Judge. Besides, this concept itself was not in any way alien to the *Jāhilī* mind (*cf.* 'Antarah, *ibid.* p. 81, v. 13)
8. Sūrah al-Sajdah (32:13).
9. See Chapter 9, section II, where these and other related words are carefully analyzed from the particular standpoint of the field semantics. See also the following section, where the two important words *kufr* and *Islām* will be treated as an illustration of the technical distinction between the 'basic' and the 'relational' meaning.
10. Sūrah 33:63, for example: "Men will ask you concerning the Hour (*sā'ah*) Say: The knowledge of it is only with Allah. What can make

you know it? It may be that the Hour (*sā'ah*) is nigh."

11. For more details about *kufr*, see later, Chapter 9, and also my earlier work *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, Tokyo, 1959, where a whole chapter (9) is devoted to a consideration of the meaning of this word in the Qur'anic context.
12. 6:91, where reference is made to the Jews who jealously keep their sacred Book of Moses having "put it into parchments".
13. *cf.*, for instance, 52:30.
14. For example, in 27:26, we read: اللَّهُ لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ ("Allah! There is no god but He, the Lord of the great Throne"), and in 20:4[5]: الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى ("The Compassionate One sits upon the Throne"). The importance of the concept of "Throne" may be seen from the favorite Qur'anic expression used in describing Allah "The Possessor of the Throne" (17:44[42]; 85:15).
15. The common image of vocabulary as a dictionary where words are neatly arranged in an alphabetical order is out of question here.
16. A technical term for designating those who lived the earlier half of their lives in *Jāhiliyyah*, and the second half in Islam; in short, the contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad.
17. We may also go a step further in this direction and try to follow from this partcular point of view the Islamic culture in the ages of its progressive movement and creative development. The semantics of the Qur'an, once established, will supply a good and truly necessary preliminary to a fruitful study of all other semantic systems that arose after the Qur'anic period: theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, mysticism, grammar and rhetoric, to mention only the most important ones. This, of course, lies far beyond the scope the present studv. But I will try to give at least some idea of this interesting problem in the next chapter.
18. As regards the close connection between this and *īmān*, see above, p. 15. *Kufr* (the verb *kafara*) has also been discussed there cursorily. As to the word *nifāq*, see my book *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, p. 168 ff.
19. For a detailed analysis of all these words, see *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, p. 113 ff.
20. The Qur'anic text suggests these two alternative views regarding this problem, a fact which causes later in Islamic theology the famous aporia of Divine predestination and human free will. See later, Chapter 6, section II.
21. In this book, as I did in my earlier one to which reference was made in the course of this chapter, I understand the word 'concept' in the scientific sense in which it is used by the authors of the outstanding

work, *A Study of Thinking*, New York, 1956, J.S. Brunner, J.J. Goodnow and G. A. Austin. The book contains in the form of an appendix a no less important paper on *Language and Categories* by Roger Brown.

22. This we shall see in the next chapter. Particularly interesting will be the historical relation between the religious world-view of the Qur'an and that of Islamic theology.

CHAPTER 2

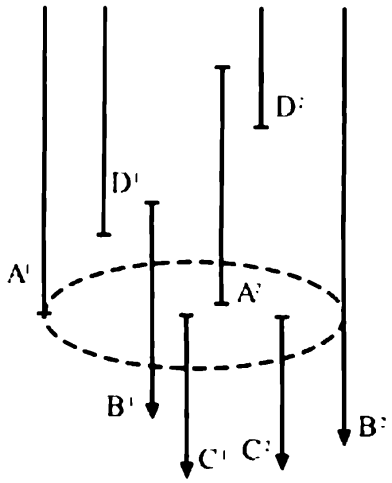
Qur'anic Key-Terms in History

I. Synchronic and Diachronic Semantics

Properly speaking, most of the problems dealt with in the present chapter do not fall within the scope of this book which, as has been made abundantly clear in the previous chapter, purports to be strictly a study of the *weltanschauung* of the Qur'an through its vocabulary. This naturally determines the extent to which our consideration will be allowed to go. Of the 'history' of the Qur'anic key-terms only the pre-Islamic, *i.e.*, pre-Qur'anic part is necessary for our special purpose, in so far as it sheds a clear light on the formation of the 'basic' meanings of the words. The historical development of the meanings in the post-Qur'anic ages is not in any way a matter of direct concern to us.

If, in spite of this obvious fact, we still insist on paying attention at this point to a few at least of the significant questions raised by historical semantics regarding the vicissitudes that some of the key-terms of the Qur'an underwent in the course of history, it is chiefly for the following three reasons. First: since, generally speaking, an examination of a question from two or more different, but closely related, angles usually ends in a deeper and more comprehensive view of the matter, we might reasonably expect that in our particular case too, considering the problem of 'vocabulary' anew as a historical process, will, as a continuation of the above discussion, help towards clarifying some important aspects of the theoretical problems that have not been discussed fully in the last chapter.

Secondly, by following the semantic development of some of the key-terms of the Qur'an in non-Qur'anic systems that came into existence in Islam in course of time, we may be able to throw a new side-light on the peculiarity of the meanings which those words had in the Qur'an itself. Lastly, a careful examination of the problem of the possibility and significance of a historical semantics will clarify, by contrast, both the advantages and limitations of the methods and principles peculiar to static semantics, and, thus, enable us to combine in the most fruitful way the two semantics in analysing the structure of the Qur'anic vocabulary.

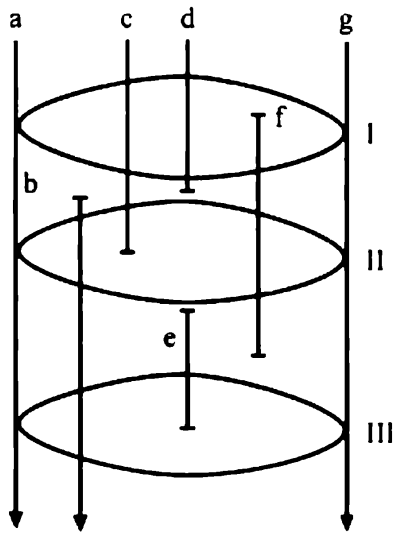


Now to go right into the *medias res*, 'vocabulary' may be looked at from two basically different methodological standpoints. In modern linguistics these two angles or points of view are called 'diachronic' and 'synchronic', respectively. Diachrony, as its etymology would suggest, is a view of language, which as a matter of principle emphasizes the element of time in everything linguistic. Thus vocabulary is, diachronically, a bundle of words, each one of which is growing and changing independently in its own peculiar way. Some words in the group may come to a stop, that is, cease to be used in the society at a certain period (*A*s); others may continue being in use for a longer time (*B*s); again new words may make their debut on the stage at a certain definite point of time and begin their history from that period (*C*s).

If we cut horizontally the flow of history at a certain period, a cross-section is obtained, which may be pictured as a flat surface formed by a number of words that have survived the flow of time up to that point. On this surface, as we see, *A*s, *B*s and *C*s appear all

together, regardless of whether they have a long history behind them (A_1 and B_2) or a short one (A_2 and B_1), or even none (C), while those that have already ceased to be active before this point (Ds) naturally do not participate in the composition of this surface, regardless of whether they have died out quite recently (D_1) or long ago (D_2). Such a surface is precisely what we have meant in the preceding pages by 'vocabulary'—an organized system of words and concepts. For it is on such a surface, and on such a surface alone that words appear to our eyes in the form of a complicated network of concepts. And the point of view which cuts across the historical lines of words and enables us in this way to obtain a static system of words, we call 'synchronic'.

We may do well to remark that vocabulary in this particular sense, i.e., a *static* surface of words is something artificial, to be very exact. It is a static state produced artificially by our stopping with one stroke the flow of history of all the words of a language at a certain point of time. The resulting cross section gives us the impression of being static and standing still, but in reality it only looks like so. To put it in another way, it is static only when we look at it from a macroscopic point of view. Microscopically, the surface is seething with life and movement. This latter point comes out very clearly when a language is in a critical, revolutionary period, like, for example, modern Turkish. Old elements keep dropping off, new elements keep coming in; some of the newcomers find a good place in the system, but many of them disappear quickly to be replaced by others. The whole vocabulary changes its aspect even at very short intervals. And when a language stands in such a stage of transition and transformation, it is extremely difficult to obtain a relatively stable, static surface.[1]



Be this as it may, in normal cases we can obtain as many surfaces as we like by simply making such artificial horizontal cuts across the historical flow of words at several points (cross-sections *I*, *II*, *III*, for example, in the diagram). And if we compare these surfaces with each other, whether the whole surfaces or only some

particular sections of them, we are doing historical semantics.

Historical semantics, thus understood does not consist in tracing the history of individual words *per se* in order to see how they change their meaning in the course of history. This latter is the typically, 19th century approach to language. Real historical semantics, as we understand it now, begins only when we study the history of words in terms of the whole static systems to which they belong, when, in other words, we compare with one another two or more 'surfaces' which one and the same language, say Arabic, presents at different stages of its history, separated from each other by an interval of time.

The interval may be made long or short according to the purpose of our analysis. For instance, even the language of the Qur'an itself may be regarded as a historical process extending over some twenty years with two distinct periods, the Makkan and the Madīnan. In that case, we may quite reasonably make two horizontal cuts across the historical development of this language these critical points, and compare the two cross-sections with each other, if our aim happens to be the semantical study of the development of Islamic thought within the confines of the Qur'an. In fact, since Theodor Nöldeke published his epoch-making view on this matter, many important discoveries have been made regarding the 'history' of the Qur'anic vocabulary, which have made it clear that the language of Revelation underwent a profound change semantically after the Prophet's migration to Madīnah.[2] Or, adopting rather a long-range perspective, we may also reasonably treat the Qur'anic vocabulary as a whole as a static system and compare it with other systems which came into existence later in Islam, as we are actually going to do in the present chapter.

Now, as a general rule, in the case of a young and vigorously growing culture like that of the early Islam, the historical development of language shows a very marked tendency towards progressing complexity and proliferation. In our particular case, the triumph of Islam established the unshakable authority of the Qur'an as the Sacred Book, and the direct linguistic effect of this made itself felt in the fact that practically the whole Arabic vocabulary was brought under the sway of the Qur'anic vocabulary, and the Arabic language in its entirety came to be affected gravely by this fact.

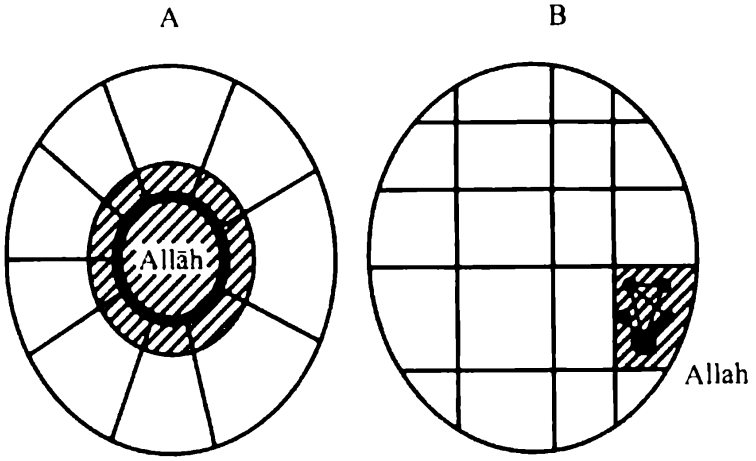
In an attempt to show this in the simplest and clearest possible

way, I would isolate three different semantic 'surfaces' in the early history of the Arabic vocabulary: (1) pre-Qur'anic, or *Jāhilī*, (2) Qur'anic, and (3) post-Qur'anic, particularly Abbasid. At the first stage thus distinguished, *i.e.*, the pre-Islamic, we have, roughly speaking, three different systems of words, with three different world-views underlying them: (1) a purely Bedouin vocabulary representing the oldest and most typically Arabian *weltanschauung* of nomadism, (2) a mercantile vocabulary, which is naturally closely related to, and based on, the former, which, however represents quite a different spirit and world-outlook, an outcome of the recent development of the mercantile economy in Makkah, which is therefore, deeply penetrated by words and ideas peculiar to the merchants of this town,[3] and (3) the Judeo-Christian vocabulary a system of religious terms in use among the Jews[4] and the Christians living in Arabia, including the more problematic Hanifitic system.[5] These three are the major constituents of the pre-Islamic Arabic vocabulary.

The vocabulary of the Qur'an is, linguistically, a mixture of these three different systems. This does not mean, however, that words drawn from the three different sources exist in the Qur'an side by side as heterogeneous elements. The Qur'anic vocabulary is, as has been repeatedly emphasized in the preceding pages, a large semantic field, and as such it is an organized totality, a self-sufficient system of words into which all words, whatever their origin, have been integrated with an entirely new systematic interpretation. Take, for example, again the most important word *Allāh*. The name of *Allāh*, as we have already seen and as we shall see more in detail later, was not unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs; it was widely known not only within the confines of the monotheistic Judeo-Christian circles, but even among the pure nomads at large. The fact, however, that the word was in use in *Jāhiliyyah* should not make us blind to another more remarkable fact that this same word *Allāh* means something quite different in the Qur'an from what it meant in pre-Islamic times. And here we see the importance of the methodological concept of 'relational' that has been introduced in the last chapter. The same old word *Allāh* acquires in the Qur'an quite a peculiar relational meaning because of its position in the organized whole.

If we compare the Qur'anic vocabulary with the pre-Islamic one as a whole, we notice immediately that the former has the supreme

focus-word, *Allāh,* which presides not only over one particular semantic field within the vocabulary, but over the entire vocabulary comprising all the semantic fields, that is, all the smaller conceptual systems that fall under it, while the pre-Islamic system of words has no such supreme focus-word.[6] This is one of the most fundamental differences between the two systems. And although, as we shall see, the pre-Qur'anic and the Qur'anic concepts have much in common in the meaning structure—not only as regards the 'basic' meaning but even a greater part of the 'relational' one—yet this one fundamental difference alone is enough to make the two systems totally different in nature and structure from each other in regard to the concept of *Allāh.*



In the Qur'anic system, there is not even one single semantic field that is not directly connected with, and governed by the central concept of Allah (*Picture A*).[7] This situation it is that, as I said in the last chapter, the non-semanticists usually mean when they say that the world of the Qur'an is essentially 'theocentric'. In the pre-Islamic system *Allāh* is but a member of one specific semantic field (*Picture B*). There is a kind of conceptual coherence in the Qur'anic world-view, a sense of a real system based on, and centered round the concept of God, which is not to be found in the *Jāhilī* system. For here, in this new system, all the semantic fields, and consequently all the keyterms are under the sway of this central and highest focus-word. In fact, nothing can escape from it; not only those concepts that are directly connected with religion and faith, but all moral ideas, and even concepts representing the most mundane aspects of human life, such as marriage and divorce, inheritance, commercial matters like contracts, debts, usuary, weights and measures, *etc.*, have been

brought into direct relation with the concept of God.

Moreover, in the *Jāhilī* system, the concept of Allah stands side by side with that of *ālihah*, 'gods' or 'divinities', with absolutely no incompatibility between them, except, of course, in the more narrowly limited and very particular field of Allah peculiar to the pre-Islamic Jews and Christians, which is not being taken account of for the moment.[8] There is in the *Jāhilī* system no sharp contrast observable between Allah and other *ālihah* even where the former is made to stand at the top of the hierarchy of all supernatural beings. Besides this semantic field of supernatural beings itself occupies quite a peripheral place in the whole conceptual system of *Jāhiliyyah* in comparison with other more important fields that have more direct relevance to the tribal life of the Arabs, the sense of honor, for example, and social and individual virtues that have nothing at all to do with God and religion.

There should be no misunderstanding here. In the Qur'anic system, too, there is the concept of *ālihah*. We must not confuse the ontological order of things with the semantic one. In other words, the fact that the Qur'anic world is essentially monotheistic should not lead us into thinking erraneously that *semantically* as well as ontologically, Allah stands alone without any peers. On the contrary there *are* concepts of 'gods' and 'idols' in the Qur'anic system. Only, all these stand in a negative relation to Allah; they are something the existence of which must be denied most emphatically. Speaking in more semantical terms, they are there in the Qur'an to be connected with the concept of 'falsehood' (*bāṭil*), while the concept of Allah is to be connected with that of 'truth' (*ḥaqq*).

A further implication of the above statement is this: when we say that the name of Allah came into the Qur'anic system from the pre-Islamic one, this should not be taken to mean that of all the semantic elements associated with the name, only those that were considered 'good' from the Islamic point of view were accepted, while all 'bad' elements were simply left behind. The fact is that all the elements, both good and bad, came into the Qur'anic system and only in this new field some were accepted and some were rejected. And this process of rejection and acceptance is vividly depicted in the Qur'an itself. Otherwise, words like *sharīk*, (partner, *viz.* of Allah), and *nidd* (similar one) would never have been given a place there.

Since the Qur'an is, linguistically, a work of genuine Arabic, it

will readily be seen that all the words used in this Scripture have a pre-Qur'anic or Islamic background. Many of them came from the rank and file of pre-Islamic Arabic. In other terms, many of them, even those that were raised to status of key-words in the Qur'an, had been in pre-Islamic times common words standing far below the level of key-words. Such was for example the word *taqwā* which we shall analyze in detail in a later context.[9] As everybody knows the word acquired in the Qur'an an enormous importance as one of the most typically Qur'anic key-terms, one of the cornerstones on which the whole edifice of the Qur'anic piety was based. But before that, in *Jāhiliyyah*, it was an extremely common word that meant simply a very ordinary sort of animal behavior—self-defensive attitude with an accompanying sense of fear.

But there were also a good number of words that came into the Qur'an in the capacity of key-terms with an important pre-Islamic history behind them. To put it in another way, some of the Qur'anic key-words had already been playing in *Jāhiliyyah* a remarkable role as key-words. Only, their semantic structure changed profoundly as they were transposed from one system to the other. As an illustration of the main thesis of this chapter, this latter case presents a more interesting—because more complicated—problem. As a matter of fact, some examples of this phenomenon have been given in the last chapter. But there they were considered in connection with problems of a somewhat different nature. Here I will give an extremely interesting example as a forerunner, so to speak, of what will come later in abundance.

The word I have in mind is *karīm*. This word was a very important key-term in *Jāhiliyyah*, meaning nobility of lineage—a man "of noble birth", going back to an illustrious ancestor by an unblemished pedigree. And since, in the old Arab conception of human virtue, extravagant and unlimited generosity was the most conspicuous and concrete manifestation of a man's nobility, *karīm* had acquired also the meaning of a man characterized by an extravagant generosity going to the degree of *our* concept of a 'squanderer'.

The meaning-content of this word had to suffer a drastic change when it was put, in the Qur'anic context, into a close relation with *taqwā* to which a passing reference has just been made. The Qur'an declared with utmost clarity that "the most *karīm* (noble)" of all men

was the one who took the attitude of *taqwā* towards Allah:

﴿إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ﴾

Surely the noblest of you all in the sight of Allah is one who is characterized by the greatest taqwā.

Al-Hujurāt, 49:13

Such a combination of two words, no one would ever have dreamt of in pre-Islamic times. This old Arabic word *karīm*, epitomizing an important aspect of the Arab outlook on life, was almost forcibly—we might say—put into an entirely new sphere of the monotheistic piety of Islam. It would be no exaggeration to say that this was indeed a revolution, revolution in the history of the moral ideas of the Arabs, for nobody in ancient Arabia would ever had thought of giving a formal definition of *karam* (nobility) in terms of *taqwā* (fear of God). From now on, a man worthy to be called 'noble' in the real sense of the word was not a man of noble birth belonging to a noble family and noble tribe, nor was he a man who would go on squandering impulsively and thoughtlessly all his possessions without stopping to reflect for a moment that he and his whole family might, by his acting in this way, be driven to utter misery and ruin the very next morning. But precisely this latter feature used to be considered the most distinctive mark of a 'noble' man. And the ancient poets never tired of praising and extolling this virtue, for it was, together with that of bravery and valor on the battlefield, almost the only means of preserving one's ancestral honor.

نُدَافِعُ عن أَحْسابِنا بِلُحُومِها وأَلْبَانِها إن الكريمَ يُدافِعُ

"We seek to defend our ancestral honor," a poet in the *Hamāsah* says, "with their (=our camels') meat and with their milk; for, verily, a *karīm* is man who is able to defend (*viz.* his honor which has been handed down to him from his illustrious ancestors.)"[10]

This character which, as I have said, was one of the cardinal virtues in the eyes of the pre-Islamic Arabs, is, from the new Qur'anic point of view, not a real virtue at all. Nor is it real generosity even, because the ultimate source from which it springs is

sheer vainglory and pride, the desire to make a show of generosity. Such a man is, in the language of the Qur'an, "expends of his wealth simply for the pleasure of an ostentatious display, and not from his belief in Allah and the Last Day":

﴿كَالَّذِي يُنفِقُ مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ﴾

al-Baqarah, 2:266 [264]

In another place it is clearly stated that those who squander away their possession from such a motive are but "brothers of Satan".

﴿وَآتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَلَا تُبَذِّرْ تَبْذِيرًا، إِنَّ الْمُبَذِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيَاطِينِ وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِرَبِّهِ كَفُورًا﴾

Give the kinsman his due, and the poor, and the wayfarer. But never waste in sheer waste for those who squander are brothers of Satan, and Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord.

Al-Isrā' or *Banū Isrā'il*, 17:28-29 [26-27]

Here we see *karīm* which once embodied the highest *Jāhilī* ideal of reckless generosity as the direct manifestation of nobility, in the process of transforming itself into something entirely new and different through the influence of a new semantic situation. The idea of generosity itself suffers a profound change; at the same time, and in correlation with it, the word *karīm* comes to be applied to a truly pious believer who, instead of expending his wealth blindly and thoughtlessly and merely for display, never hesitates to expend it for a definite purpose which is really 'noble' in the new conception, *i.e.*, in alms, "in God's way" (*fī sabīl Allāh*)[11], being always careful to strike the happy medium, between sheer prodigality and sheer miserliness,[12] and that from the deep religious motive of *taqwā*.

Thus one and the same word makes its appearance with the same basic meaning in these two successive systems, but it is given an entirely different value and entirely different connotations according as it is used as a key-term in one or the other because of the particular associations it forms around itself in the particular sector of the system. And exactly the same thing happens between the Qur'anic vocabulary and the subsequent systems, albeit in a far subtler and

therefore, less obvious way. This we shall see presently.

II. The Qur'an and the Post-Qur'anic Systems

When we come down to the third stage of development as distinguished above, that is, the classical age of Islamic culture, we meet with a proliferation of relatively independent conceptual systems. In other words, Islam produced many different systems of thought in the post-Qur'anic periods, theology, jurisprudence, political theory, philosophy, mysticism being among the most important of them. Each of these cultural products of Islam developed its own conceptual system, *i.e.*, its own 'vocabulary', itself consisting of a number of sub-systems just as we have seen in the case of the Qur'anic vocabulary. Thus we are fully entitled to speak of the vocabulary of Islamic theology, the vocabulary of Islamic jurisprudence, the vocabulary of Islamic mysticism *etc.*, in the exact sense as defined above. And the whole body of these various vocabularies constitutes the vocabulary of the Arabic language in the classical age of Islam.

In view of the tremendous and, indeed, peerless importance of the Qur'anic vocabulary as the very language of Divine Revelation, it is quite natural that all the post-Qur'anic systems were deeply influenced by it. All of them, in their linguistic aspect, were in varying degrees dependent and based on the vocabulary of the Qur'an. They could grow and flourish, so to speak, only on the soil that had already been prepared by the language of Revelation. Semantically this situation may adequately be described by saying that many, if not all of the key-terms in these systems were supplied by the Qur'anic vocabulary. Even in the case of words that were not capable of being traced back to the Qur'anic source, conscious effort was often made to relate them in some way or other to this or that expression in the Qur'an. The authority of the Qur'an was so great that every system had thus to have recourse to the Qur'anic vocabulary for its material elements, if not directly at least indirectly.

Besides, speaking in more general terms, the Arabic language—or, any language for that matter—however rich it may be, is not rich enough to supply each of the different systems with an entirely new and different set of words. So most of the elements used

in constructing the systems must of necessity be common to them. Only, each elaborates nearly the same elements in its own peculiar way, and thereby constructs an independent network of words and concepts.

It is not necessary for our present purpose—nor is it at all possible—to consider in detail the semantic structure of these post-Qur'anic systems. Each would call for separate treatment. Here I must content myself with referring to only three of them—theology, philosophy and mysticism—and giving a few typical examples in each case in order to illustrate the main contention of this chapter.

Of all the conceptual systems that grow up in the classical period of Islam, theology (*kalām*) is the one that is most faithful and loyal to the Qur'anic vocabulary. The theological thinking begins to flourish among the Muslims partly under Greek influence but largely and mainly as a natural growth necessitated by the changed historical conditions in which Islamic civilization finds itself now. So let theology be our first object of consideration.

The very first point to notice about Islamic theology is that its material is almost wholly Qur'anic. And in this particular case, we may justifiably take the word 'material' in a wider sense than strictly linguistic, for almost all the basic problems of theology owe their origin to the Qur'an itself, and are therefore traceable in some way or other to the Qur'anic thought and its verbal expressions. Islamic theology, in short, is essentially based on the teaching of the Qur'an. It was, after all, the result of the effort of the human intellect and reason to grasp this very teaching more systematically and theoretically. It is natural, then, that its key-terms were largely supplied by the Qur'anic vocabulary. Almost all the major concepts of Islamic theology were directly taken from the Qur'anic text, and in many cases theological terminology was but a scholastic and theoretic elaboration of the words and phrases of the Qur'an. Of course, the principle itself of conceptual organization was quite different in each case; otherwise there would have been no theological vocabulary as an independent system of concepts. And yet, on the whole, the vocabulary of Islamic theology may be said to have remained more faithful to the Qur'anic one than any other system.

Thus theology would seem to furnish a very suitable occasion for discussing in concrete terms one of our major theoretic problems. If, on the one hand, the theological vocabulary is, in a certain sense,

a continuation and development of the Qu'ranic one, and, as such, owes much of its material to the latter, and yet, on the other hand, constitutes an independent conceptual stem by organizing the whole material according to its own principle of structuralization, then the difference between the two will have to be sought mainly in the 'relational' side of the key-terms. The difference, however, is in many cases extremely subtle, and difficult to grasp, particularly when exactly the same words are used in almost exactly the same contexts. The opposition of *kāfir* (infidel) and *muslim* (Muslim) offers an excellent example, as we shall few paragraphs later.

I would like to begin by taking up an easier case. Even the word *Allāh* is made to change its conceptual structure when it leaves the Qur'an and the theological system. In theology, the central position occupied by this word remains of course the same as in the Qur'anic vocabulary. It is still the highest focus-word reigning over the whole system. And all the key-concepts are still under the undisputed sway of this highest concept. So, apparently, nothing has changed. And yet we observe here a profound inner transformation that has taken place just under the surface.

The structure of the concept of Allah was transformed in this new system, first and foremost, by its having been put into a direct conceptual relation to the so-called Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names. Of course, if we look for these 'ninety-nine names' in the Qur'an, we find them already adumbrated everywhere. The Qur'an is full of words and phrases that describe Allah from various angles: Allah is such and such—for example, He is *wāḥid* (One), *ghafūr* (All-forgiving), *raḥīm* (Merciful) *etc. etc.*; and Allah does such and such a thing—for example, He "speaks", He "creates" *etc. etc.* But these and the like are there in the Qur'an as simple descriptions that should be taken naively as they are, without sophistication. In theology, this principle of simple and unsophisticated understanding is no longer kept intact. For the theologians, all the concepts of this kind represent so many manifestations of the very nature of God; they are, in other words, all Divine attributes, that is, inherent qualities of the Divine essence.

This means simply that the concept of Allah has now come to be understood in terms of 'essence' (*dhāt*) and 'attributes' (*sifāt*), and this, again, means that the theologians have now assimilated the typically Greek way of thinking, which tends to interpret the whole

world of being and existence in terms of 'essences' and 'attributes'. As part of the grand scale process of the arabization of the Hellenistic heritage, so characteristic of the Abbasid period, this may have to be considered an achievement worthy of acclamation. But from the purely and strictly Qur'anic point of view, this marks nothing but a big step away from the original form of thought.[13] We read, for example, in the Qur'an that God "speaks" to man, but in no way is speaking regarded there as an attribute of Allah; there is not even a slightest suggestive hint for such interpretation. While in theology 'speech' (*kalām*) constitutes one of the most essential Divine attributes. This is not surely the Qur'anic approach. And the concept of God itself, when understood in this way as a transcendental 'essence' opposed to its 'attributes', is no longer a Qur'anic concept in its original form.

It is not the scholastic theology alone that caused such a radical inner transformation in the conceptual structure of the word *Allāh*. Other systems did same thing, each according to its dominant mode of thinking. This point will be made thoroughly clear by a comparison of the theological vocabulary with those of mysticism and philosophy.

There are grounds for regarding Islamic mysticism, or Sūfism, also as continuation and development of the basic religious teaching of the Qur'an. Semantically this means that the mystics make use of many Qur'anic words as their key terms. Compared with the theologians' use of the same words, however, theirs is in most cases extremely free and even arbitrary. They tend to attach to the words they find interesting in the Qur'an meanings—*i.e.* 'relational' meanings—that are detached from the actual contexts, their guiding principle being always one of symbolic interpretation. It is quite natural that the symbolic meanings that they read into the words turn out in many cases to be of an essentially different nature and far removed from those attached to the same words by the theologians

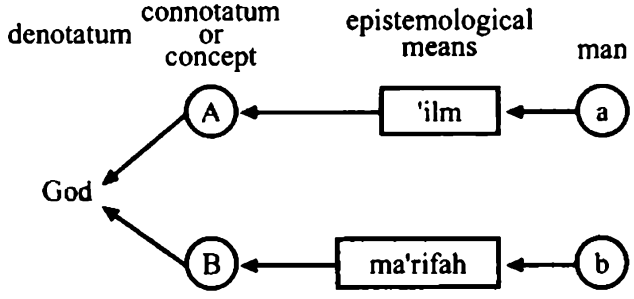
The mystic system affects most profoundly even the central concept of Allah. Several remarkable points of difference occur to our mind as worthy of notice in this connection, but here it will be enough to consider briefly the most conspicuous and decisive one. In all non-mystical systems as well as in the Qur'an itself, Allah epistemologically, can only be an object of *'ilm*. In other words God can only be known to man indirectly. Man is not allowed to approach

God too closely. You cannot see God without any veil (*hijāb*), at least in this world.[14] There can be here no intimacy, *i.e.*, an immediate personal communion. Certainly, God reveals Himself, but He does so only through his *āyāt* (signs). And man, on his part, is allowed to know God only through the *āyāt*, that is, natural things and natural phenomena understood as so many 'signs' indicative of Divine goodness, majesty and power.[15] Even Moses who, in the Qur'an, is allowed to come closest to Divine Presence cannot look God in the face. This kind of knowledge given "from behind the veil", to use the Qur'anic expression, is *'ilm*. It is an indirect sort of knowledge that can only be gained through some other things that are directly given to man.[16]

The mystics, in Islam as elsewhere, claim to have a knowledge of God that is essentially different from this: *ma'rifah*, that is 'gnosis', a direct, immediate, and most intimate sort of personal contact, which in some form or other culminates in a personal union of the knower and the known, just as a lover and his beloved become united in the experience of love into one person.

As is obvious, this changes everything. Not only is the conception of human nature and human psychology completely transformed, but the very concept of God must necessarily change in its semantic structure by being made an object of *ma'rifah*, while in the non-mystical systems it can only be an object of *'ilm*. Semantically we may describe this situation by saying that the 'relational' meaning of the word *Allāh* varies according as it is taken is the object of mystical *ma'rifah* or as the object of normal human *'ilm*.

Of course, as long as you are a Muslim, Allah you believe in remain objectively always the same God of the Qur'an, whether you are a mystic or theologian. But the aspect of this God, which manifests itself in your conception of Him is quite different in each case.



In the diagram here given, a man (*a*), an ordinary orthodox Muslim, forms for himself the concept of God through *'ilm*, while (*b*), a

mystic, does the same through *ma'rifah*. The resulting concepts *A* and *B*, as concepts, are essentially different from each other, although the denotatum, *i.e.*, the objective God Himself, lying beyond these concepts is exactly the same. So essential and fundamental was this difference between the two concepts that the Islamic orthodoxy often came to the conclusion that the concept *A* and concept *B* of God could not refer to one and the same God. And this naturally led to a very grave indictment against the mystics. For if, in reality, the denotatum itself—not the concept—of the God of the mystics was different, the latter would simply be doing nothing other than worshipping a different God from the God of Islamic Revelation. Many mystics had to face the constant danger of being accused of heresy by the intransigent orthodoxy, in spite of all the references they made to the Qur'an in defence of their position. In this sense the mystic exegesis of the Qur'an is of paramount importance and interest to a semanticist.[17]

When we turn from mysticism to philosophy, we find the same process of semantic transformation pushed further ahead. If, of all the post-Qur'anic systems, theology remained on the whole most faithful to the original Qur'anic usage of words and concepts, Islamic philosophy took a bold and determined step in the direction of arabizing a foreign system, and this is disclosed with particular clearness in the usage of the most important Islamic key-terms, *Allāh*, for example, *nabiy* (prophet), *waḥy* (revelation), *'aql* (intellect), and others. The matter is complicated because it is not a simple straightforward departure from the Qur'anic usage of these words. The philosophers, who, Arabs or non-Arabs, used Arabic as their intellectual tool in thinking and writing, struggled, on the one hand, to build up a new vocabulary in Arabic language, which would be capable of expressing with exactitude Greek ideas and concepts, and yet, on the other, tried to attach it to the Qur'anic tradition. Hence the very peculiar nature of the relational meanings that grew around the Qur'anic terms.

Thus the word *Allāh*, which is being the central point of our interest now, does no longer denote in philosophy simply the same thing as that living God of Creation and Revelation as He is so vividly depicted in the Qur'an. Among the theologians, too, the concept suffers, as we have just seen, a drastic change, and yet it is still an intellectual and theoretic elaboration of the original Qur'anic

conception. Here, among the philosophers, the underlying image is not so much the Qur'anic one of God as the Aristotelian concept of the cosmic 'Mover' plus that of the Plotinian 'One'. The philosophers do their best to show that they are just trying to bring out the deep philosophic meanings that lie hidden under the Qur'anic expression. They do use Qur'anic words and expressions in describing Allah; they refer to the Qur'an, and they treat problems raised by the Qur'an. But this of course does not satisfy the pious believers, as is shown in the most outspoken way by the harsh expression which the intransigent theologian Ibn Taymiyyah uses in reference to them: "a small insignificant group of the ignorant philosophers" (*juhhāl al-falāsifah*).

The philosophers assert, for instance, that their 'God' can be in reality no other than the God of the Qur'an, the Lord of Creation. But there appears on the stage a man like al-Ghazzālī[18] who tries to tear off mercilessly the veil to disclose the real nature—as he sees it—of the philosophical concepts. He shows for example, how in his view Avicenna's *khalq* (creation) is but a mock-concept, *i.e.*, a pseudo-concept of creation, which has, in reality, nothing at all to do essentially with the true Qur'anic concept of Divine Creation, and is even susceptible of being considered a flat negation of the latter, because it is nothing but a disguised form of the neo-Platonic concept of Emanation.

It will be obvious that the language of Islamic philosophy presents a number of extremely interesting problems to the semanticist. Some of them that appear to be directly relevant to our immediate concern will be dealt with theoretically towards the end of the present chapter. There I shall try to show by some concrete examples the truly singular make-up of the philosophical vocabulary as a conceptual system in Islam. Meanwhile I would like to go back to the vocabulary of the theologians, from which we have deviated, and discuss a few interesting cases which would illustrate my main contention on historical semantics.

I have no intention at all here to go into historical details even as regards the four or five key-terms that I am going to take up. This is evidently not a proper place for a discussion of that kind; it would belong to the semantics of Islamic theology. My intention is only to show, in connection with immediate theoretic problem that concerns us, how in course of time there occur gradually and almost imper-

ceptibly, in most cases—shifts of emphasis, changes in interest and subjective approach in the understanding of one and the same word, as it moves from one system to another. What I am going to give is a broad and general outline, just the skeleton of the matter, so to speak, without flesh and blood.

With this initial understanding, we shall take up as our first example the conceptual pair formed by the words *muslim* (Muslim) and *kāfir* (infidel) which stand, as is obvious, in opposition to one another. If we trace these two Qur'anic key-terms back to the earlier pre-Islamic stage, we notice that originally they did not even form a pair. Both words were there certainly, but there was no essential connection between them. Moreover, neither of them had any religious connotation, *muslim* meaning "a man who hands over something precious to another who demands it of him" and *kāfir* "a man who does not show gratitude to his benefactor". It is only at the second stage of development, that is, within the Qur'anic system, that the two are put in opposition to one another. In other words, the Qur'an brings them together for the first time and puts them into one semantic field, putting *muslim* on the positive side and *kāfir* on the negative. This semantic field is that of *īmān* (belief) which we have come across earlier.

In this new field, *kāfir* (or, to use the corresponding nominal form, *kufr*) stands opposed to *īmān* contradictorily, while *Islām* (the nominal form corresponding to *muslim*) and *īmān* are complementary concepts. Most obviously, emphasis, in the Qur'an, is mainly and predominantly placed on the contradictory opposition of *īmān-Islām* and *kufr*. And this reflects faithfully the real state of affairs in the earliest period of Islam, when the Prophet and the small number of his followers were fighting hard for the establishing of the new religion and had to wage a fierce war against those who refused to accept it. It was literally a war between *Islām* and *kufr*, between 'Muslims' and '*Kāfirs*'. The situation was such that everybody had to make a decision as to whether he should choose *Islām* or *kufr*.

Only in an important passage, *Islām* is made to stand in sharp contrast to *īmān* and the two are clearly and very consciously distinguished from each other.

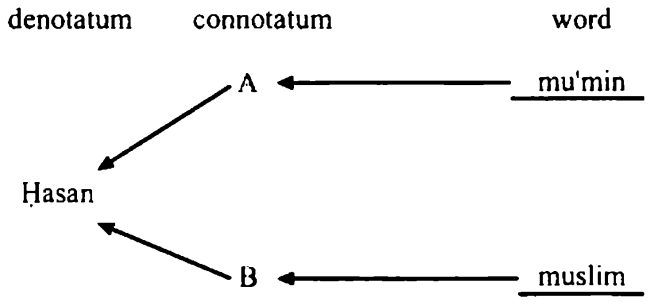
﴿قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُل لَّمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَٰكِن قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي
قُلُوبِكُمْ﴾

The Bedouins say: "We believe [īmān]." Tell them: "You do not believe yet. You should say rather, 'We have surrendered[19] *[Islām], for the belief [īmān] (in the true sense of the word) has not yet permeated your hearts'."*

Al-Hujurāt, 49:14-15.

This is, indeed, a remarkable statement, because here we see *Islām* defined in the clearest possible terms as the first step towards *īmān*, a preparatory stage at which 'faith' has not yet penetrated deep into the heart. However, we must bear in mind another significant fact that this definition of *Islām* was given in explicit reference to the Bedouins of the desert, whose lukewarm nature in religious matters is often referred to not only in the Qur'an but also in *Hadīth*. As regards ordinary Muslims, the Qur'an never makes such a distinction. Far from being a superficial kind of 'faith', *Islām*, as a spiritual act of the complete surrendering of one's self to Divine Will, is regarded as a supreme religious value.

As a matter of fact, in normal contexts, the two words *muslim* (a man of *Islām*) and *mu'min* (a man of *īmān*) are used interchangeably, both being used to denote a man who has chosen the straight way of Divine Guidance (*hudā*) and thereby escaped from the future punishment of Hell. In more technical terms, we might say that the two words have exactly the same denotatum although each of them refers to this same denotatum through a different connotatum. As our diagram shows, the same concrete individual, say, Hasan, may be referred to differently as "a man who believes in God" or "a man who surrendered himself to God". That is to say, the two words refer to different conceptual aspects of one and the same person.[20]



In any case, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the contrast bet *īmān* and *Islām* was, at the Qur'anic stage, far less important and crucial than the sharp opposition in which these two

concepts as a unit stood to *kufr*. The opposition *muslim*(*-mu'min*)-*kāfir* was one of the burning problems that confronted the nascent community of Islam.

This fundamental conceptual opposition was carried over just as it been into the theological system that arose in the post-Qur'anic period. Now, from the semantical point of view, Islamic theology is, as we saw earlier, a conceptual system based essentially on the Qur'anic vocabulary. It inherits from the Qur'an a whole body of words and concepts. The opposition we are talking about is part of this conceptual heritage. So nothing changes apparently as regards the basic pair, *muslim-kāfir*. However, if we examine the matter more carefully we find that there has occurred a subtle, but clearly observable shift of emphasis and interest, a change in the fundamental outlook on the same problem. In other words, the contrast between *muslim* and *kāfir*, though outwardly the same, does no longer carry exactly the same meaning. And this is attributable to the changed cultural situation in which the Islamic community has found itself.

Islam as a religion has now long been established. Arabia as a whole embraced this religion; then, immediately following this, the islamization of the major part of the ancient world of civilizations has changed the cultural map of the world. Within this well-established system of Islam, it is naturally no longer necessary to lay so much stress on the opposition of Muslims as monotheists and *kāfirs* as polytheists. In place of this old opposition, there appears a new opposition of concepts, which begins to occupy the attention of the thinkers.

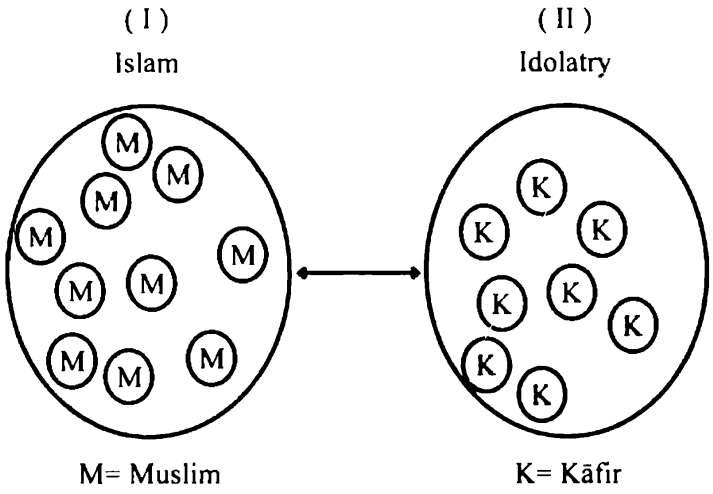
The rise of the *Khārijiyyah*, Khārijī sect, brings right into the Islamic sphere of concepts itself the basic contrast between *muslim* and *kāfir*. As far as the outward form goes, this contrast remains just the same, but its inner structure is no longer the same. For the problem does not fundamentally concern any longer the difference between the Islamic monotheist and the pagan polytheist or idolater. It concerns now a distinction within the very confines of Islamic monotheism, among the very Muslims. For, according to the view held by the Khārijites, a Muslim, once he has committed a grave sin ceases to be a *muslim*; he must be considered a *kāfir* destined for Hell, and may, therefore, even be justifiably killed. This introduces into Islam a very dangerous element, because the concept itself of the "grave sinner" is one of an extremely flexible or mobile nature in the

sense that it is susceptible of being extended to any direction so that it may include anything one does not like.[21] Take, for example, the famous *Ḥadīth* preserved by al-Tirmidhī in his *Collection of Authentic Ḥadīth*[22] concerning the Qur'anic exegesis, which runs:

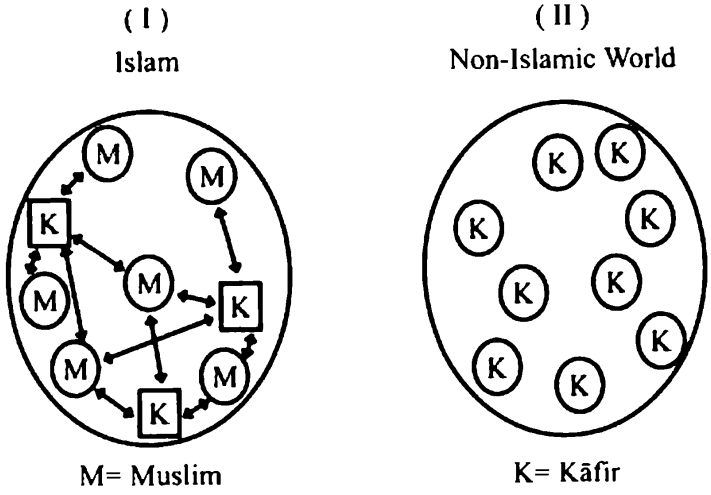
«مَنْ فَسَّرَ الْقُرْآنَ بِالرَّأْيِ أَيْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ فَقَدْ كَفَرَ».

> One who interprets the Qur'an according to his personal opinion, that is, not according to the knowledge,[23] has proved himself by that very fact to be a *kāfir*.

We can picture from this the gravity of the situation if we remember that this and similar bitter indictments were made freely and were even circulated in the name of the Prophet.



(Diagram A)



(Diagram B)

It is quite understandable that such a general state of affairs came to be reflected in the semantic structure of the word *kāfir*, and, consequently, of the word *muslim*. Hitherto these words had been signs of two fixed categories, and the basic contrast between them had been somewhat like this (*see diagrams on page 52*).

In the circle (*I*) which symbolizes the earlier Islamic community, every member is a Muslim. And no Muslim can conceivably be a *kāfir*, as long as he believes in the unity God and recognizes Muhammad as the Apostle of God. In the *Diagram B*, the circle (*I*) still represents the Islamic community. But we perceive a remarkable change that has taken place here. Now the concept of *kāfir* has been brought right into this circle, and *muslim* and *kāfir* form a sharp conceptual contrast in the very midst of the Islamic system. Henceforth a Muslim, that is, one who believes in God and acknowledges Muhammad as the Apostle of God, may very easily be turned into a *kāfir* and publicly labeled as such merely by thinking or acting in this or that way. The concept *kāfir* has lost its denotative stability and fixedness, and become something mobile, ready to be applied even to a pious Muslim if he happens to do this or that. Thus we see that this is not a mere continuation of the Qur'anic contrast between *muslim* and *kāfir*, but an essentially new one, in a certain sense at least, although the two words still keep their basic meaning and a greater part of their relational meaning as well.

It is implied in the very nature of what we generally call a 'system' that, if any important point in it happens to be changed or moved, reprecussions inevitably make themselves felt in all the remaining parts of it. The changed relation just described between *muslim* and *kāfir* made it incumbent upon the Muslims to take up the concept of *muslim* itself, to examine its content more systematically and to define the word afresh in terms of the new historical and social situation in which they lived. This may be considered, as Wensinck[24] has said, an attempt made by the young Muslim community to define its own position, not against other communities, but, primarily, for itself. Such was indeed the compelling force of the age. Further, this must be viewed against background of the increasing intellectual tendency among the Muslims, which was remarkably directed towards theoretic and systematic speculation, and through speculation towards more and more rigorous structuralization of Islam

It was in accordance with this new intellectual trend that the problem of the relation between *īmān* and *Islām* became a matter of no small concern to Muslim thinkers. The principal problem regarding *īmān* (belief) was now how its concept was structured, not so much in contrast to *kufr*, as it had been case at the Qur'anic stage, as in itself. The question, in short, was: Of what and how many conceptual elements was it composed? And the question, conceived and formulated in this way, necessitated that the answer be given also analytically. Thus the various answers that were actually given to this basic question were all strikingly 'analytic', in the sense in which modern semantics understands the word. Al-Shāfi'ī's famous definition of *īmān* in terms of three concepts: (1) assent by heart, (2) public verbal confession, and (3) the observance of religious duties, was a clear attempt to answer this question through conceptual analysis. Al-Ash'arī's no less famous formula is another example, which makes *īmān* consist of (1) 'saying' (*qawl*) and (2) 'doing' (*'amal*).

A great number of different answers were offered in the course of the development of Islamic theology by different sects and, indeed, by different individuals. The Murji'ites (*murji'ah*), for example, held that *īmān* should properly be defined in terms of 'knowledge'—*i.e.* knowledge of God, excluding thereby 'doing', that is, actions, from the concept of 'belief'. The Karramites (*karrāmiyyah*), to take an extreme case, took the view that *īmān* should be defined solely in terms of 'saying', that is, verbal confession (*al-iqrār bil-lisān*). This definition led to a grave, but extremely interesting, theoretic consequence.[25]

They held that a man who kept *kufr* (disbelief) secretly in his heart but professed *īmān* should be considered a *mu'min* (believer) in the real sense of the word, although he was destined to live afterwards in the Fire eternally, while a man who had real *īmān* in his heart but did not publicly confess it was not *mu'min*, although he was actualy going to be rewarded in the Hereafter by life of eternity in the Garden.

Such technical discussions on the structure of the concept of *īmān* raised inevitably the problem of the exact conceptual relation between *īmān* and *Islām*, both of which, as we saw, had meant in the earlier period practically the same thing. And the concept of *Islām*, too, was submitted to a semantical analysis.

Here again a number of divergent definitions were offered. But the commonest type makes *Islām* consist of what later comes to be known under the name of the Five Pillars of Islam. The first and foremost place is occupied by the *īmān* itself; then come *ṣalāt* (ritual prayer), *zakāt* (alms-giving), *sawm* (the fast—of Ramaḍān) and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah). In other words, understood in terms of a hierarchical combination of the concept of *Islām* is now understood in terms of the concept of faith with those of the cardinal religious duties. Semantically this is tantamount to saying that the concept of *Islām* now constitutes a small but typical semantic field by itself, with *īmān* as its focus-word and the remaining four words surrounding it.

As we have seen above, *Islām* in the Qur'anic context meant initially "self-surrendering (to God)". The corresponding verb *aslama* was inchoative; it signified that a man, by this very act of self-surrender, went into an entirely new phase of life, that something entirely new started from that moment in his life. This original connotation became very much obscured, if not completely lost, in the new conceptual system life. Here we have a clear case of the shift of emphasis in the structure of word-meaning to which reference was made earlier.

This kind of semantic elaboration of concepts, with ensuing shift of emphasis is observable everywhere in the Islamic thought of that age. Here I will give one more example, which is similar to but somewhat different from, the case we have just examined. The word is *'ilm*, meaning generally 'knowledge'.

The basic meaning of this word, to be more exact, is one's knowing something about something—'knowledge by inference' as opposed to and distinguished from 'knowledge by acquaintance' in the terminology of Lord Russell, as we have already seen. As far as concerns this 'basic' meaning, the word stands for one and the same concept whether it is used in pre-Islamic poetry, the Qur'an, or theology. But its 'relational' meaning differs in an essential point from system to system. The difference comes from the conception—which varies from case to case—of the 'source' from which the knowledge is derived. In other words, what matters most in determining the real concrete semantic structure of the word *'ilm* is the question: Where have you derived your knowledge from? It will be easy to understand this point if we remember that 'knowledge

by inference' is by definition a piece of derived knowledge, that is, something induced from some given data.

In *Jāhiliyyah*, *'ilm* meant primarily a kind of knowledge about something, derived and induced from one's own personal experience of the matter. *'Ilm* in this sense was opposed to *zann*, which meant the result of mere subjective thinking, and, as such, something groundless and, therefore, unreliable. The following verse by the famous pre-Islamic poet Ṭarafah brings out this contrast very clearly:

وَاعْلَمْ عِلْماً لَيْسَ بِظَنٍّ أَنَّهُ إِذَا ذَلَّ مَوْلَى الْمَرْءِ فَهُوَ ذَلِيلُ

What he wants to say is this: "I know through experience that when a near relative (or cousin) of a man has (been allowed to) fall into an humiliating situation, that would mean no other thing than that he himself has fallen into such a situation". And he emphasizes that this is his 'knowledge' (*'ilm*), and not a mere *zann*. By this he means that this is an absolutely reliable knowledge because he has derived it from his own experience, which is quite different from a piece of groundless thinking with no objective guarantee to support it.

In the *Jāhilī* conception, *'ilm* may have its source in something different from this: tribal tradition. It is a particular kind of knowledge that has been handed down from generation to generation in the tribe, which, therefore, has the tribal authority behind it. In reality, this is not at all different in nature from the first kind. For it is nothing other than the result of innumerable pieces of personal experience by different persons that have been gradually accumulated through ages and handed down as an immaterial tribal asset. This latter type of knowledge guaranteed by repeated experiences through untold ages goes easily beyond the limit of a tribe and tends to become what we may call a national asset of the Arabs as a whole. Such knowledge is usually formulated and propagated and handed down to posterity in the form of proverbs (*amthāl*). Hence the very great value attached to proverbs in ancient Arabia. And it was part of the important function of poets to give terse and forcible expressions to this kind of knowledge.

In conclusion, we may give a brief definition of the word *'ilm* as understood by the pre-Islamic Arabs by saying that it is a sound, well-grounded piece of knowledge guaranteed by personal or tribal

experience which, therefore, can claim an objective and universal validity.

In the Qur'an, the word becomes a very important religious key-term. It goes without saying that here I am putting out of consideration *'ilm* as: Divine attribute, for that is another problem. We are concerned now only with *'ilm* as a human phenomenon. In the Qur'an *'ilm* is still used in opposition to *zann*, as well-grounded knowledge opposed to groundless pseudo-knowledge. So here again nothing has changed apparently.

Only, we notice that there has occurred a radical change in the conception of the ground for validity. *'Ilm* is, as I have said, an absolutely reliable piece of knowledge because its validity is fully guaranteed by something objective because it has been derived from a good source. Thus far its meaning is the same whether the word occurs in pre-Islamic poetry or the Qur'an. But the ground, the source from which it is derived is remarkably different in the two cases.

In the Qur'an, the word is placed in the new conceptual sphere of Divine Revelation and associated with other words than those it used to be associated with in *Jāhiliyyah*; it is now knowledge derived from the Revelation of God, that is, information given by no other than God Himself; it has an objective validity because it is based on the 'Truth' (*Haqq*), the Divine *Haqq* which is the only Reality in the full sense of the word. Compared with the absolute reliability of this source, all other sources are essentially and by nature unreliable. And viewed in this light, the old *'ilm*, *i.e.*, that kind of knowledge that used to be considered sound and well-grounded in *Jāhiliyyah* because derived from one's own personal experience must be degraded to the lower degree of *zann*.

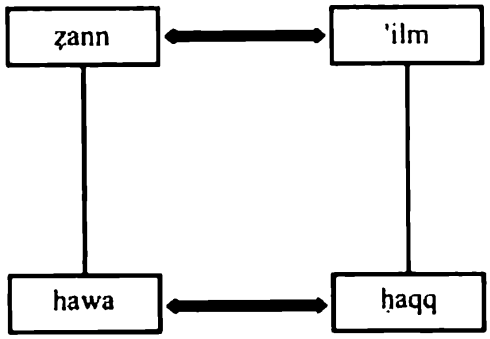
Quite a big part of what has once been regarded as well-ground knowledge in *Jāhiliyyah* must now be considered something essentially groundless: mere fancies and surmises, conjectures. A great number of Qur'anic verses may be adduced in illustration of this fundamental change. Here is, one of them:

﴿وَمَا لَهُم بِذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ﴾

Of that they have no certain knowledge ('ilm). They are merely, conjecturing (zann)

Al-Jāthiyah, 45:23 [24

This is said in reference to the *Kāfirs* who stubbornly refuse to believe in God and the Hereafter, and say emphatically that "There is nothing but our earthly life. We die, we live, and that is all!", as if they had an ultimate knowledge about human destiny. In reality, the Qur'an declares, what they have is not *'ilm*; it is a mere conjecture.[26]



The Qur'an goes a step further and makes it clear that the ground or source of *zann* is *hawā*, *i.e.*, the natural inclination of the impulsive and perverse human soul which is by nature blind and reckless in its behavior, as is well shown by the pre-Islamic usage of the word *hawā* in the sense of the blind passion of love. *Zann*, in this sense, is often paraphrased in the Qur'an as *ittibā' al-ahwā'*[27] meaning literally "the following of one's own personal caprices", and is, in this form, put in opposition to *'ilm*, which, in such a context, means, in short, nothing but Divine Guidance, or Revelation.

﴿بَلِ اتَّبَعَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَهْوَاءَهُم بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ﴾

Nay, but those who do evil (i.e. Kāfirs) follow their own caprices, without knowledge.

Al-Rūm, 30:28 [29]

Here the expression *bi-ghayri 'ilmin* ('without knowledge') must not be taken in the simple sense of 'without knowing', *i.e.*, 'unintentionally'. For, according to the Qur'an, the evildoers do what they do very consciously. The word *'ilm* carries greater weight, and *bi-ghayri 'ilmin* means "instead of having recourse to *'ilm*"—*'ilm* being understood in the sense just explained. The contrast between *ittibā' al-ahwā'* and *'ilm* comes out still more clearly in a verse like the following:

﴿وَلَئِنِ اتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُم بَعْدَ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِن وَلِيٍّ وَلَا وَاقٍ﴾

If you should follow their caprices (ahwā'), after the knowledge ('ilm) that has come to you, then you would have no protector against God nor any defender.

Al-Ra'd, 13:37

Thus there is no room for doubt that the word *'ilm*, when it is used in the capacity of a key-term in the Qur'an, means *the* knowledge derived from the absolutely reliable source, which is nothing other than Divine Revelation. And the same word in the well-known Qur'anic phrase *al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilmi* ("Those who are firmly rooted in knowledge"), which designates the true believers, can be understood only in this sense.

This relational meaning which the word has acquired in the Qur'an is brought into Islamic theology. Here, again, the fundamental semantic structure shows no change. Only, the conception of the absolutely reliable source becomes enlarged, because now the traditions of the Prophet have established the claim to rank with the Qur'an as another real source of *'ilm*. And this necessarily alters the whole balance of power in the system. Moreover, we observe here even a subtle shift of emphasis and interest. That kind of absolute knowledge based on Divine Revelation, upon whose supreme importance the Qur'an so emphatically insisted, is no longer a problem for debate and discussion, as it once was between Muslims and *Kāfirs*. In the well-established Islamic world, its importance is so self-evident to be discussed; it is something to be simply taken for granted. The attention of the Muslims is now drawn mainly towards the nature of the other source of true *'ilm*, which, although human in nature and not divine, is, nevertheless, said to be capable of furnishing human knowledge with something like super-human validity.

Under such intellectual conditions, with the problem of the validity of *Hadīth* occupying the attention of the thinkers, the word *'ilm* comes to acquire the meaning of a very particular kind of knowledge that can be traced back by an unbroken and unblemished chain of authorities to the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. "On such and such an occasion the Apostle of God gave such and such an opinion on such and such a question". This is *'ilm*. It is a kind of

absolute knowledge, because its source is the Prophet himself, who, as Imām al-Shāfi'ī pointed out,[28] is mentioned in the Qur'an side by side with God in the form of "Allah *and* His Apostle". Only those who, in making any statement, base their assertion on this absolutely reliable authority, are infallible. All others are but followers of their own personal 'caprices' (*ahwā'*). And any assertion based on *hawā* is called *ra'y* (personal opinion), meaning an arbitrary, groundless opinion. It is to be noticed that the word *ra'y* carried in those days a far greater weight than the simple translation 'opinion' would suggest, because it was directly associated by many people with downright *kufr*. It may also be interesting to notice in this connection that the orthodox school of theology often referred to heterodoxy as *ahl al-ahwā'*, *lit.* 'people of caprices'.

By this summary history of the word *'ilm* through three different stages—*Jāhiliyyah*, Qur'an and theology—together, with the consideration that preceded it of the field of *īmān*, *islām* and *kufr*, I think I have illustrated how concepts undergo a gradual and subtle semantic change each time they are introduced into a new system. So much for theology.

We shall bring this chapter to an end by discussing in some detail the nature of the vocabulary of Islamic philosophy so that we might have an occasion to examine the basic problem we have been dealing with from a somewhat different point of view.

In opening this new section, will it be necessary to remind the reader that the motive from which I take up now this subject is not the desire to talk about Islamic philosophy for its own sake? My real aim is to explain by a concrete example what I have called the 'diachronic' view in semantics, *i.e.* a comparative examination of the various conceptual systems that arise in the course of history within the confines of one and the same language, which, in our particular case, happens to be Arabic.

Now Arabic, at the apogee of the Abbasid period, becomes an extremely rich and highly organized cultural language—indeed, one of the most important among all the cultural languages of the world. Its richness does not consist merely in the astonishing number of the words used, but, first and foremost, in the number and complexity of the conceptual associations, *i.e.*, systems, that they form among themselves. The philosophical vocabulary is one of them.

The tremendous importance and interest which the rise and

development of Islamic philosophy presents to the semanticist lies in the fact that, semantically, it was a most radical and daring attempt on the part of the outstanding philosophers to create their own vocabulary away from the linguistic authority of the Sacred Book. In fact, the vocabulary of the philosophers in Islam has one very remarkable peculiarity which, linguistically, makes it something of an essentially different nature from all other sister systems, like theology and jurisprudence, mysticism, *etc.*, that arose in Islam in the post-Qur'anic period. All these were, from the linguistic point of view, invariably a natural growth and elaboration of the original genuine Arabic language, each in a particular direction. Nothing was forced upon Arabic and its natural resources from outside. Certainly, remarkable changes did occur in many places, as we have seen above. Theology, in particular, was very much influenced by Greek philosophy in the formation of its linguistic tool. But cases of this kind were after all, sporadic and were not systematic. On the whole we might say that the growth of the post-Qur'anic vocabularies was a result of a spontaneous and natural process of conceptual transformation which was brought about and made necessary by the changing cultural situation. Philosophy forms the exception.

Only in the case of philosophy, a complete system of foreign concepts, a very particular conceptual network that had originally nothing at all to do with the Arabic language and its world-view was given from outside as the ideal model. And in order to meet the demand of this stranger, the conceptual network originally existent in Arabic had to be largely disorganized and reorganized, and many new concepts that were quite alien to the Arab *weltanschauung* were forcibly introduced. In short, a whole new system of concepts had to be built up on the Greek model.

Here the Muslim intellectuals learnt new concepts first and then had to look for suitable words in the Arabic language to symbolize them. But since the concepts themselves were foreign, there occurred naturally discrepancies between thought and language everywhere. Not even one single key-term of Greek philosophy found a perfect equivalent in the Arabic language, to be very exact. A similar situation had already occurred when Greek philosophy began to be transplanted in the Roman world in the Latin language. Cicero complained of the difficulty of handling Greek concepts in Latin because of the immaturity of his language, however rich it was, for

an abstract philosophical thinking. But the distance between Greek and Latin was both culturally and linguistically almost minimum when compared with that between Greek and Arabic.

Thus the Arabic language, in this case, had to face suddenly the overwhelming impact of a foreign thought with a long historical process behind it, fostered in an entirely different cultural milieu, and couched in a language which was in many important respects even diametrically opposed to it. Here Arabic had to abide a most crucial test in its capacity as a cultural language. And it did stand the test.[29]

The result was that there appeared in the Arabic language a very particular sort of vocabulary—a conceptual system on a grand scale, based on the semantic principle of what I would call 'semi-transparency'. This I shall try to explain in the following.

Let us, to begin with, recall the very fundamental fact that Arabic is a language which, besides being astonishingly rich in basic words, shows an amazing capacity in deriving new words out of given material with a systematic regularity. This rendered it possible for the philosophers to find—not without difficulty, to be sure—almost always genuine Arabic words whose 'basic' meaning corresponded at least approximately to the basic meaning conveyed by the Greek philosophical terms. In such cases, all they had to do was strip the Arabic words in question of their 'relational' elements that had grown around the 'basic' meanings and replace the former, by means of definition, by the relational ones peculiar to the corresponding Greek words.

The word *'aql*, to take a typical example. This word in pre-Islamic times roughly meant 'practical intelligence' displayed by man in ever-changing situations. This corresponds to what is called in modern psychology the problem-solving capacity. A man with *'aql* was a man who, in whatever unexpected situation he was put, could find by himself some means of solving the problems arising from the new conditions and find a way out of the danger. Practical intelligence of this kind was greatly admired and highly estimated by the pre-Islamic Arabs. And no wonder, for otherwise it would have been impossible to live safely in desert conditions. The famous robber-poet al-Shanfarā uses this word exactly in this sense in the following verse in which he boasts of his being naturally endowed with such practical intelligence:

لَعَمْرُكَ مَا بالأَرْضِ ضِيقٌ على امْرِئٍ سَرَى رَاغِباً أَوْ رَاهِباً وَهوَ يَعْقِلُ

As long as a man keeps his intelligence active (*wa-huwa ya'qilu*) there can be no embarassing situation in which he may not know what to do (*dīq*) whether he be on his way to what he desires or hastening away from some thing he detests.[30]

In the Qur'an, this word, as a key-term, acquires a more specified religious meaning. There, in contexts of decisive importance, it is used to mean the intellectual and spiritual capacity of the human mind, which enables man to understand the 'signs' (*āyāt*)[31] that God graciously shows to the mankind and to grasp their deep religious implications.

Making reference, for example, to the rain which God "sends down from heaven" so that it might give life again to the earth after its temporary death, it is said:

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

Verily therein indeed are signs (āyāt) for people who keep their 'aql active (*ya'qilūna*, verbal form corresponding to the noun *'aql*).

Al-Rūm, 30:23 [24]

Likewise, referring to one of the ancient Cities that were destroyed by Divine wrath which their inhabitants incurred upon themselves by their wrongdoings:

﴿وَلَقَد تَّرَكْنَا مِنْهَا ءَايَةً بَيِّنَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ﴾

Verily we have left out of the (City) a clear sign (āyāt) for people who keep their 'aql active.

Al-'Ankabūt, 29:34 [35]

Here the mouldering ruins of an ancient city are interpreted as "a clear sign" of the lash of Divine wrath, a grave warning to those who refuse to believe in God. Similar examples abound in the Qur'an.

The same word *'aql* comes into Islamic philosophy, again as one

of its key-terms. But its semantic content, that is, the structure of the concept symbolized by the word is no longer the same, because the whole underlying world-view is entirely different, being something essentially foreign to the traditional Arab one. Whenever we come across this word actually used in Islamic pliilosophy as a technical term, we are strictly required to understand it, not in terms of the original meaning which it carried before the rise of philosophy as a genuine, Arabic word, whether in *Jāhiliyyah* or in the Qur'an, but in terms of the Greek concept of *nous* in its Aristotelian and neo-Platonic sense. This is not in any way a natural development of the pure Arabic concept of *'aql*, but something artificial. At least initially, it was artificial.

The same old word *'aql* is still used, as if nothing changed. In reality, it has undergone a remarkable change, for the word has been made 'transparent', as it were; we are required to "see through it, and to read the Greek word *nous* behind it. Just as in modern times we have to read behind the Arabic word *shuyū'iyyah* the European word 'communism', and behind *qawmiyyah* (nationalism), so here, too, the Arabic word *'aql* must be understood in accordance with the meaning structure of the Greek word *nous*, which it has acquired in classical and Hellenistic philosophy. The word has now a very particular meaning of 'intellect' on a grand cosmic scale covering all the successive stages of Emanation, from the Universal Intellect which is the first emanation from the Divine essence down to the human intellect and reason.

Let it be noticed, however, that this word, as a genuine Arabic word, carries its own long history on its back, and this weighty past cannot help making itself felt, to a certain extent at least, whenever the word is used, even in philosophy. This proves a hindrance to its acquiring complete transparency. Hence the very peculiar state of semi-transparency of this kind of words. And it is characteristic of Islamic philosophy that almost all its key-terms are of this type. Semantically, Islamic philosophy is a very curious system consisting of 'semi-transparent' words.

The reason why I would call this type of word 'semi-transparent' will be made much clearer if we compare words like *qaumiyyah*, 'nationalism' (from *qaum*, 'people' or 'nation') and *wad'iyyah*, 'positivism' (from *wad'*, 'putting') in modern Arabic with such words as *dimūqrātiyyah* (democracy) and *telefūn* (telephone). The latter

words are completely transparent; Western words are there palpably in the most naked form, while words like *qaumiyyah* and *wad'iyyah* mean what they mean only through the intermediacy of genuine Arabic words, each one of which has its own proper meaning and history in Arabic language. The word *wad'iyyah*, for instance, would mean literally 'positing-ism' because *wad'* means 'putting' or 'positing', and this much of literal meaning functions as a semantic bridge between the two words, i.e., *wad'iyyah* and 'positivism'; the point is that, through this middle term, one should be led to the Western concept itself of 'positivism' in a flash, passing over the bridge as lightly as possible.

In this respect, the contrast, again in modern Arabic, between *telefūn* and *hātif*, both meaning 'telephone', is very interesting and illuminating. Or as we have just seen, completely 'transparent', being nothing but an arabized form of the word 'telephone' itself, and the other is obviously 'semi-transparent'. 'Semi-transparent' here means that the word has its own long history behind in the Arabic language and that this heavy history still tends to make itself felt whenever the word is used. *Hātif* in classical Arabic means "somebody whose voice you hear but whom you do not see anywhere around". In this we find the word often used in old Sufi literature in reference to some mysterious voice calling a future mystic from somewhere in heaven, urging him to renounce the worldly pleasures and turn to other-worldliness. The existence of such a weighty past naturally offers a serious obstacle to the word's becoming a simple sign of a new idea introduced from the West only recently. Compared with its rival *telefūn*, which is 'transparent' from the very outset, *hātif* finds itself in a very difficult situation because it has to overcome the obstacle before it can become a perfect Arabic equivalent of the word 'telephone'.[32]

The problem that concerns us next is that of the degree of semi-transparency. *'Aql* which we have treated above is a typical example of the case in which semi-transparency was achieved in an ideal way. But in many other cases the semi-transparency was not achieved so easily. The word *'aql* as an Arabic equivalent of the Greek *nous* did not present any serious problem to the philosophers because the basic meaning was roughly the same in both languages. Sometimes it so happened that the Muslim thinkers —or to be more exact, the first translators from Greek to Arabic starting from a given Greek

concept, did not find easily a word, within the Arabic vocabulary, with a basic meaning which would make it an appropriate equivalent of the Greek word; the concept of Being is an example in point, to take by far the most important of all.

As everybody knows Greek philosophy from its very beginning till its end was consistently and predominantly concerned with the problem of being and existence. In other words, ontology was the central preoccupation of the Greek thinkers. Consequently the concept of being occupied the most important place in their philosophical thinking. This is particularly conspicuous in Aristotle, who was admittedly the greatest teacher of the Arabs in this matter.

The Arabs, on the other hand, had traditionally shown no concern at all with such a problem particularly at such an abstract level of thinking. Certainlly, even a *Jāhilī* Arab knew that things did exist, including himself, his camels, and other people around him, but he had never made the 'existence' itself of such things a particular subject for reflexion. Being a matter of no concern, there was no corresponding concept, and there being no concept, there was no word to express it.

Speaking in more general terms, we may say that the Arabs as a whole were a least metaphysical people. The general and the universal did not attract their attention. Their dominant—and almost exclusive—concern was with individual, concrete things, or rather, the concrete aspects of the concrete things. The ancient Arabs seem to have taken an infinite delight in scrutinizing with a most penetrating eye details after details of the concrete things that they saw around them. Hence the astonishing richness of the Arabic vocabulary expressing all the observable aspects of all the concrete things. But they, to all appearance, were lacking in the genius of going in the opposite direction, *i.e.*, that of going up step by step from the most concrete individual things and their concrete material aspects to general and abstract ideas tracing the logical lines of connection between individual things and abstract ideas. They were fundamentally 'particularists' in this sense.

Here I cannot resist the temptation to quote a few lines from the *Fajr al-Islām* ("*Dawn of Islam*") by the late Prof. Aḥmad Amīn of Cairo.[33] In chapter IV of this remarkable book, dealing with the problem of "The Intellectual Life of the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times", he writes as follows:

The Arabs did not look at the world with a general comprehensive view, as did the Greeks, for example, the latter, when they began to philosophize, encompassed the whole world of being with a general view and put to themselves questions like the following: How did this world come into existence? The world as I see it is full of changes and alterations; is not there behind all these changing things one unchangeable principle?... The whole world as I see it looks like something essentially one, all the parts of which are connected, with each other, and which, as a whole, seems to be following some immutable laws; What, then, is this order? How and from what did it originate?

These and other similar questions the Greeks put to themselves, and that was the origin of their philosophical thinking; the very basis of which was thus a comprehensive view of the world. The Arabs, in contrast to them, did not look in this direction, and that even after the advent of Islam. They looked around themselves, and if by chance the eye caught some particularly interesting sight, they got excited and the surging emotions would find an outlet for expression in verses or proverbial sentences...

As to a comprehensive view and a careful analysis of the principles and properties of the things that excited such emotions their intellect (*'aql*) found them quite foreign to itself. Moreover, even when an Arab did look at a thing, it did not usually induce in his mind a deep reflection on the object; on the contrary, he would merely stop at this or that particular aspect which aroused his interest. When, for instance he stood in front of a tree, he would not view it in its entirety: he would only fix his sight upon some particular point of it, the straightness of its trunk, for example, the beauty of its branches, *etc.* Standing in front of a garden, he would not try to get an extensive of the whole of it, nor would his mind try to have a photographic grasp of it. His mind would rather be like a bee flying from flower to flower, taking sip from every flower.

It is this peculiarity of the Arab mind that explains both the defect and beauty that you find in Arabic literature, even in that of the later Islamic ages.

... In short, the Greek mind if it looks at something, looks at it as a whole, examines it, and analyzes it while the Arab mind goes around it, and discovers there beautiful pearls of various kinds, which however are not strung together into a necklace.

As is easy to see, people of this type make first-rate lyrical poets, but are not good by nature for philosophy. This implies also

that their language will be at its best in lyrical poetry, and at its worst in ratiocinative philosophy, for its vocabulary, if left to itself in its natural state, would not develop abstract concepts that are indispensable for metaphysical thinking.

The concept of Being was one of the most important abstractions that were lacking in the vocabulary of the Arabs—the abstract concept of *to einai* which was a haunting obsession of the Greek philosophical mind. When it came into the Islamic world, and the thinkers really felt themselves forced to look for a word in the Arabic language that might stand appropriately for this concept, two words offered themselves.[34]

One of them was the verb *kāna* (*kawn*). But this was far from being the exact equivalent of the Greek abstract concept of Being, for the verb meant basically "to take place" or "come to pass". There is, in other words, an important element of 'becoming' in the meaning structure of this word: not pure 'being' but 'being' as something that is born and then goes on growing or changing in course of time: *werden* instead of *sein*, the Germans would say.

So quite naturally the word ends in Islamic philosophy by becoming rather the Arabic translation of another Greek word *genesis* which was used by Aristotle as an important technical term of his ontology, to designate the concept 'coming into being', *i.e.*, the dynamic process of 'becoming' rather than the static idea of 'being' pure and simple.

Another candidate was the root *WJD*, with the basic sense of 'finding'. This root-meaning, particularly when taken in the passive sense 'to be found' (*wujida*), comes tolerably near to the meaning of *to einai*. At least it excludes connotation of 'becoming' or 'coming into being'; moreover it conveys the sense of something being there by chance: in other words, of something being there simply existent, without its being necessary to be there. This last element, which in philosophical terminology is called 'contingency' is something essential in the conceptual structure of 'being' and 'existence', except of course in the only one case of the 'Necessary Being' (*wājib al-wujūd*).

In this way the word *wujūd* with the understanding that one should take it in the passive sense of 'being found' came gradually to be established as the Arabic equivalent of *to einai*.

However one cannot help feeling that something foreign and

strange had been forced here upon the Arabic language from outside, and in fact the word *wujūd* in this philosophical sense remained for a long time outside the common Arabic usage. This we can see from the causal remarks made by al-Ghazālī in his *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*[35] to the effect that "it often happens to be difficult to make the word *wujūd* understood in the strictly philosophical sense so that it is necessary and desirable from time to time to use a foreign word if the philosophers want to make themselves quite clear".

And we see also Ibn Rushd (Averroes) hesitant to use this word without reserve, for, as he says, it often misleads the readers. The passive participle of the same verb *mawjūd* is used in Islamic philosophy as the Arabic equivalent of the Aristotelian *to on* (Latin *ens*): *i.e.*, 'being' in the sense of "something that exists" or an "individual substance". But, according to Ibn Rushd, many people, instead of making the Arabic word *mawjūd* semantically semi-transparent and reading directly the Greek concept *to on* behind it, as they should do, make the word *mawjūd* opaque, so to speak, and tend to understand it in the sense of "something found", which is, really, the basic meaning of this word in Arabic. That is why, he says, the new abstract noun *huwīya,* lit. 'he-ness' or 'it-ness' has been coined, from the pronoun *huwa* (he), as a more accurate equivalent for the Aristotelian subject-substance, *i.e.*, individual substances.[36]

It will have been seen from what precedes that a comprehensive and systematic re-examination of the history of Islamic philosophy from the particular point of view of semantics is something that will richly repay the effort. Such a study will not only bring to light a great many interesting points regarding the details of semantic transformation which individual concepts underwent; it will, further, contribute much towards letting semantics advance as a cultural science, *i.e.*, as a really productive tool for research in the scientific analysis of *weltanschauungs*. This, however, is mnentioned here only as a possible future task. It is not necessary—nor is it possible at all—for present purposes to go into any more details. What I wanted to do in the last section of this chapter was simply to show, first, that there can be theoretically such a thing as 'diachronic' semantics which differs in its fundamental attitudes from 'synchronic' semantics, but is, at the same time, intimately connected with the latter, and, secondly, by way of illustration, how Islamic philosophy, as a conceptual system, had to take great pains in developing its own

vocabulary within the confines of Arabic vocabulary, under the immediate and ovewhelming influence of an entirely foreign conceptual system.

Let us now turn to our proper subject: the problem of the structure of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*.

Notes

1. This is the main reason why it is so difficult to compile a good dictionary of present-day Turkish.
2. There is a certain respect in which Prof. Montgomery Watt's works, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, 1953 and *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford, 1956, may be rightly regarded as a comprehensive study of this phenomenon. As one of the most interesting examples we may mention the very problematic word *tazakkī*, which he discusses from the philological point of view in *Muhammad at Mecca* (Excursus D). He shows there how this word representing the important religious concept of 'self-purification' or 'being purified' falls off gradually and fades out in course of time before another more important word *Islām* meaning 'self-surrendering'.
3. Regarding the significance of this particular vocabulary in the formation of the Qur'anic language, see, for instance, C. C. Torrey, *The Commercial-Theological Terms of the Qur'an*, Leiden, 1892.
4. We must remember that Madīnah at that time was one of the biggest centre of Judaism.
5. As regards Ḥanīfs and their language, see later Chapter 4, section V.
6. Except, of course, in the narrower section of the Judeo-Christian monotheistic ideas. But evidently the Jews and Christians are not in any way representative of the pre-Islamic Arabia. They are, after all, a local phenomenon, linguistically at least.
7. In the diagram *A*, the central area surrounding the word *Allāh* represents a semantic field consisting of words which stand for various concepts used in the Qur'anic description of what Allah 'does' and 'is'. This is what will develop later in Islamic theology into what is known under the name of 'Divine attributes' (*ṣifāt Allāh*).
8. For a detailed consideration of the relation between the purely *Jāhilī* conception of Allah and the Judeo-Christian one, and the influence which the latter might have exercised upon the former before the name

of *Allāh* came into the Islamic system, See Chapter 4, which is exclusively devoted to this very problem.

9. See Chapter 9, section II.
10. *Dīwan al-Ḥamāsah (sharḥ al-Marzūqī)*, ed. Aḥmad Amān and 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn 4 vols., Cairo, 1951, Number DCCXLVI, 2, the name of the poet unknown.
11. See for example, 57:57; 2:263-264 [261-262].
12. See 17:31-32 [29-30]; 25:67.
13. This point has been brought out admirably well by Dr. Daud Rahbar in his book, *God of Justice*, Leiden, 1960. See particularly its introductory chapter.
14. Thelogically, this is the famous problem of 'Beatific Vision', which has been much discussed by the theologians in Islam.
15. Hence the paramount importance attached in the Qur'an to the concept of *āyāt*. A passing reference to this point has already been made above, but the problem will be dealt with more systematically in a later context (Chapter 6).
16. The distinction may be brought out by saying that *we know about God*, but we do not *know God*. In the terminology of Bertrand Russel, *'ilm* is 'knowledge by inference' as opposed to and distinguished from 'knowledge by acquaintance'.
17. Goldziher's study, *Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, Leiden, 1920, may regarded as a good introduction to this problem.
18. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (or al-Ghazzālī), 1059-1111. His *Tahafut al-Falāsifah,* known in the West as *Destructio Philosophorum* is a systematic refutation of Islamic philosophy represented by Avicenna (Ibn Sinā, 980-1037). Besides, his argumentation in this book is pricipally based on a conceptual analysis. And many passages of it may be adduced, as they are, even as an illustration of the analytic technique of modern semantics.
19. Or, "We have become Muslims (formally)".
20. The Qur'anic connotation of *mu'min*, according to the definition given by the Qur'an itself, is this: a man who has an unwavering faith (*īmān*) in God and His Apostle, never conceives doubt, and is ready to stake his wealth and life for the cause of God (cf. 49:15). The connotation of *muslim* is: he who has surrendered his whole being, soul and body, to God, and to God alone, absolutely (cf. 2:122 [128]; 125 [131]).
21. For a brief but illuminating explanation of Kharijite thinking on this problem, see Montgomery Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society*, London, 1961, pp. 99-102.
22. *Sahīh al-Tirmidhī*, Cairo, 1950, II, 157. The *hadīth* here quoted is to all appearance spurious, but this gives a better ground for regarding it

as a faithful reflection of the tendency of the age.

23. Thereby is meant the particular kind of knowledge that can be traced back by an unbroken chain of truthful transmitters to the Prophet or his immediate companions.
24. A. J. Wensinck, *Muslim Creed*, Cambridge, 1932, chapter III.
25. See Imām al-Ḥaramayn, al-Juwaynī: *Kitāb al-Irshād*, ed. M. Yūsuf Mūsā and 'Alī 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, 1950, p. 386. The Karrāmites were the followers of Muhammad b. Karrā—hence the name *karrāmiyyah*—in the second century of Hijrah who upheld the principle of extreme anthropomorphism in the interpretation of the Qur'anic description of God. Imām al-Ḥaramayn himself, by the way, takes the view that *īmān* means nothing but *taṣdiq*, 'considering true' (*viz.* God and consequently, His Messenger) which is the only definition possible "linguistically", as he says. (*ibid.* 397).
26. This is an extremely important passage disclosing as it does to our eyes the dark pessimistic mood which underlied the *weltanschauung* of the pre-Islamic Arabs, and which drove many of them, particularly, the more reflective minds, to a notoriously riotous and dissolute life (cf. *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran, chapter V*). This passage shows that, from the Qur'anic point of view, the pre-Islamic pessimism is nothing but a result of *ẓann*, and is, therefore, completely groundless.
27. *ahwā'* pl. of *hawā*.
28. See his famous *Risālah*, Cairo, 1940, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, for instance. The entire book may be taken as a clear manifestation of such an attitude towards this problem.
29. The problem is not only of historical interest. It is also of contemporary relevance, because present-day Arabic is again faced with a big problem of a similar nature under the impact of Western culture, namely, the pressing need of assimilating the key-concepts of the West and creating a new vocabulary out of old material, a vocabulary that will be rich enough and flexible enough to cope with the new situation of the world, and that without overstraining the natural morphological and lexicological resources of this language. In fact, all the non-Western nations are faced with the same problem. And the problem is, extremely important because it is not a mere matter of language, but a matter of *weltanschauung*, namely, the question of how we should articulate and interpret the world we live in. It is, in this sense, a big problem that involves grave cultural issues.
30. *Lāmiyyah al-'Arab, v. 4.*
31. See chapter 6, section I.
32. As a matter of fact, the word *hātif* has succeeded in making itself

'semi-transparent' in Syria and Lebanon, where it is currently used in daily life, but not in Egypt. As regards the more general problem of the arabization of the Western present-day Egypt, we have an extremely valuable book by Mr. Maḥmūd Taymūr, *Mu'jam al-Ḥaḍārah* (*Lexicon of Modern Culture*), Cairo, where almost all the names of things and ideas belonging to modern civilization that have recently been introduced into Arab world are classified and examined critically one by one.

33. Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr al-Islām*, Cairo, 1955, p. 41-44.
34. See the most lucid exposition of this problem by Mlle. Goichon in her *Philosophie d'Avicenne*, Paris, 1951, chap. II, to which I am greatly indebted in what follows.
35. al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*, Cairo, al-Tijariyyah, 2nd ed. 1963, II, p. 8.
36. Goichon, *op. cit.* p. 78.

CHAPTER 3

The Basic Structure of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung

I. Preliminary Remark

This chapter aims at giving a bare outline of the basic structure of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* as a preliminary to a more detailed analysis of some of the most important semantic fields that will come in the remaining chapters. Such a total picture is indispensable if we want to be in a position to assign the appropriate places to the particular problems that are going to occupy us; regarding the relation between God and man in the Qur'an. For, as we know already, the proper position of each individual conceptual field, whether large or small, will be determined in a definite way only in terms of the multiple relations all the major fields bear to each other within the total *gestalt*.

Furthermore, there is a more immediate reason why we should begin our work by trying to obtain a general view of the conceptual scheme of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*. As will have been made abundantly clear in the preceding two chapters, the semantical analysis of the Qur'an, in the sense in which we understand it in this book, does not mean a lexicographical treatment of the whole Qur'anic vocabulary, *i.e.*, a study of all the words that happen to be there in the Qur'an, but it means an analytic and systematic study of only the most important words that seem to play a decisive role in characterizing the dominant note[1] that runs through, permeates and dominates the whole Qur'anic thought. Only the important words of this kind, *i.e.*, the key-words, determine the character of the whole

system. But in order to be able to measure the importance of the words and distinguish what is relatively more important from what is relatively unimportant in this particular sense, we must have beforehand a general schematic picture of the whole thing. Otherwise, we would simply end by losing ourselves in the minutiae.

For the purpose of isolating the fundamental conceptual framework of the Qur'an as a whole, the first requirement is that we should try to read the Book without any preconception. We must, in other words, try not to read into it thoughts that have been developed and elaborated by the Muslim thinkers of the post-Qur'anic ages in their effort to understand and interpret their Sacred Book each according to his particular position. We must try to grasp the structure of the Qur'anic world conception in its original form, that is, as it, was read and understood by the Prophet's contemporaries and his immediate followers. Strictly speaking, this must always remain an unattainable ideal, and yet at least we should do our best to approach this ideal even a step nearer.

Now in reading the Qur'an for this purpose, and as a semanticist, the first and overwhelming impression I get is that this is a large multi-strata system standing on a number of basic conceptual oppositions, each one of which constitutes a specific semantic field. Speaking in terms less semantical, I would say that I get the impression that here I am in a world over which reigns an intense atmosphere of spiritual strain and tension. What is before our eyes is surely not a plain, objective description of what has happened, what is happening and what will happen. This is not a world of calm peaceful description.

On the contrary, we feel that there is some intense spiritual drama going on. And a 'drama' always occurs only where there is a dynamic opposition between the principal actors. This is a complicated system of oppositions that are formed, each one of them, by two poles that stand facing each other. The pole is indicated, semantically, by what we have called a 'focus-word'. In short, from the semantical point of view, the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* is capable to be represented as a system built on the principle of conceptual opposition.

II. God and Man

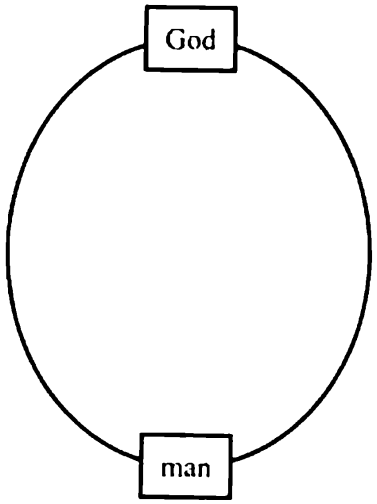
The first and most important 'opposition' in this sense is constituted by the fundamental relation between God and man, *Allāh* and *insān*. Needles to say, Allah, according to the Qur'an, is not only the supreme but also the Only Being worthy to be called 'being' in the full sense of the word—Reality with a capital letter—to which nothing in the whole world can be opposed. Ontologically, the Qur'anic world is most evidently theocentric, as I have said more than once. God stands in the very centre of the world of being, and all other things, human or non-human, are His creatures and are as such infinitely inferior to Him in the hierarchy of being. There can be, in this sense, nothing that would stand opposed to Him. And this is precisely what was meant when it was said above that, semantically, Allah is the highest focus-word in the vocabulary of the Qur'an, presiding over all the semantic fields and, consequently, the entire system.

There is, however, a certain respect in which we might feel ourselves justified in putting the concept of 'man' (*insān*) at the opposite pole from God. For among all these created things 'man' is the one which is attached so great an importance in the Qur'an that it attracts at least the same amount of our attention as God. Man, his nature, conduct, psychology, duties and destiny are, in fact as much the central preoccupation of the Qur'anic thought as the problem of God Himself. What God is, says and does, becomes a problem chiefly, if not exclusively, in connection with the problem with how man reacts to it. The Qur'anic thought as a whole is concerned with the problem of the salvation of human beings. If it were not for this problem, the Book would not have been "sent down", as the Qur'an itself explicitly and repeatedly emphasizes. And in this particular sense, the concept of man is important to such a degree that it forms the second major pole standing face to face with the principal pole, that is, the concept of Allah.

And this basic confrontation of the two major poles with each other constitutes the most important conceptual opposition in the Qur'an that, together with the others, goes to create that intense dynamic and dramatic atmosphere of spiritual tension which, as I have just said, characterizes the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*.

Thus, the world of the Qur'an may be visualized as a circle with

two principal points of reference upon it, opposed to each other, one from above, the other from below (*Diagram*). And this circle would symbolize the world of Being as the main stage on which all human dramas are enacted.



Jāhiliyyah did not know such a circle. The world-view of *Jāhiliyyah* was homocentric. There, man was the sole conceptual pole to which no other basic pole stood in fundamental opposition. Man, his destiny on earth, his position in the tribe to which he belonged, the relation of his tribe to other tribes, his virtues which were essentially tribal in nature, these were the major problems of a *Jāhilī* man. Of course he recognized the existence of unseen powers superior to himself in the scale of being, ranging from Allah to *Jinn*, but these occupied, after all, a narrow, limited section of the world of his concern; they were not so important as to constitute an independent major conceptual principle which would divide this world with 'man' into two halves. There was, consequently, no atmosphere of spiritual tension running through the whole world of being as a *Jāhilī* man conceived it.

Now in the new world of Islam, the dramatic and spiritual tension to which I have just referred is caused, semantically speaking, by a particular relation between the two major conceptual poles, *i.e.*, God and man. This relation is neither simple nor unilateral; it is a multiple and bilateral, that is, reciprocal relationship.

This complex relationship may conceptually be analyzed in terms of four major kinds of relation between God and man. In other words, the Qur'anic '*divina commedia*' is enacted on the main stage to which reference has just been made in the form of four different types of relation between *Allāh* and *insān*.

1. *Ontological relation*: between God as the ultimate source of

human existence and man as the representative of the world of being which owes its very existence to God. In more theological terms, the Creator-creature relation between God and man.

II. *Communicative relation*: here, God and man are brought into close correlation with each other—God, of course, taking the initiative—through mutual communication.

Two different ways of communication are to be distinguished: (1) verbal type and (2) non-verbal type. The verbal type of communication from above to below is Revelation (*wahy*) in the narrow and technical sense, while from below to above, it takes the form of 'prayer' (*du'ā'*).

The non-verbal type of communication from above to below is the Divine act of the sending down (*tanzīl*) of the 'signs' (*āyāt*). From below to above, the communication takes the form of ritual worship (*ṣalāt*), or more generally, cult practices.

III. *Lord-servant relation*: this relation involves, on the part of God, as the Lord (*rabb*), all concepts relating to His majesty, sovereignty, absolute power, on the part of man as His 'servant' (*'abd*) a whole set of concepts humbleness, modesty, absolute obedience, and other properties that demanded of a servant. This human part of the relation has a negative correlative that consists of the concepts implying haughtiness, arrogance, self-sufficiency and other similar qualities that are comprised in, and asscoiated with the word *Jāhiliyyah*.

IV. *Ethical relation*: this is based on the most basic contrast between two different aspects that are distinguishable in the very concept of God, God of infinite goodness, mercy, forgiveness and benevolence on one hand, and on the other, God of wrath, and severe, strict and unrelenting justice. Correspondingly, there occurs, on the human side, the basic contrast between 'thankfulness' (*shukr*) on the one hand, and the 'god-fearing', attitude (*taqwā*), on the other. As we have seen above, *shukr*, and *taqwā* together form one category and this last makes a sharp contrast with *kufr* both in the sense of 'unthankfulness' and in that of 'disbelief'.[2]

III. The Muslim Community

These basic relations once established between God and man, they give birth, midst of mankind at large, to a particular group of men who acknowledge them and choose the positive side of the matter as the basis of their outlook on life and existence. What I call here 'positive' response consists as regards the first ontological relation, in their acknowledging God as their Creator, *i.e.*, One who has conferred upon man as an extraordinary favour his very existence and being, and, having given him life, takes care of his destiny. In regard to the second relation, that of communication, it consists in man's responding willingly and wholeheartedly to the divine call and following its guidance to the way of salvation. In regard to the third Lord-servant relation, the positive response means that man throws away from himself all the remants of his former *Jāhiliyyah* and behaves to God, his Master, as truly befits a slave. Lastly, in regard to the ethical relation, it means that he shows 'thankfulness' to God's favors and—which is in reality nothing but the reverse side of the same thing—to fear seriously the divine chastisement.

These people form in the nature of the case a compact group, a religious community. This is the concept of 'community' (*ummah*), or to be exact, *ummah muslimah* which originally meant a "community (of people who have) surrendered (themselves to God)"[3] but ended by acquiring the meaning of the "Muslim community"—to which the Prophet in the *Hadīth* constantly refers by calling it *ummatī* ("my community").

The importance of this concept cannot be too much emphasized. Its birth marked really a decisive moment in the history of Islam.[4] Hitherto in Arabia, the principle of social and political organization had been of an essentially tribal nature. The point needs no laboring because it has been studied so much by so many different authors. In short, blood-kinship had been the most decisive element in the *Jāhilī* Arab conception of social unity. Against this time-honored conception, the Qur'an developed a new idea of social unity based no longer on kinship, but on a common religious belief.

The establishment of this new concept of 'religious community' caused naturally a great disturbance in the structure of the semantic field of 'society'. First of all, it created a sharp conflict between the concept of the Islamic *ummah* and that of those who definitely and

openly refused to come into this community, *i.e.*, *kuffār*, the *Kāfirs*, the latter category including within it as a subdivision the smaller category of *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites), who pretended outwardly to belong in the Muslim community, but, in reality, remained in the other camp.[5]

But there was a far more delicate problem there. The concept of *ummah* once established in Islam, the Muslims found that there were around them all other 'religious communities' which had already been long existent when Islam arose, like Jews, Christians, Sabians, and Zoroastrians. The Qur'an calls these as a whole "the People of Scripture" (*ahl al-kitāb*), meaning those who possess a Scripture, those nations to whom, in each case, a Prophet has been sent, who has brought them a book of Revelation.

Looking back from this standpoint, the Qur'an divides the whole mankind before the advent of Islam into two major categories: (1) the People of Scripture and (2) those to whom the Book has not been given, people with no Scripture (*ummiyyūn*). And these two categories are sharply opposed to each other. The opposition is clearly mentioned in several verses; for example:

﴿وَقُل لِّلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالأُمِّيِّينَ...﴾

"And say to both those to whom the Book has been given and the *ummiyūn*..." (*Āli 'Imrān*, 3:19 [20]), the context itself makes it clear that, in this verse, "those to whom the Book has been given" refers to the Jews and the Christians, while by *ummiyūn* the idolatrous Arabs are meant.

It is important to notice that the pagan Arabs, before the advent of Islam are called here, as in many other places, *ummiyyūn* ("non-Scripture people"). Properly speaking, they are not yet *Kāfirs* (*kuffār* or *kāfirūn*), because as yet they have never been admonished to open their eyes to the marvelous work of God. Real *Kāfirs* are those who consciously show the most determined opposition to the Divine scheme, after the Revelation has made the truth clear to them. The Prophet himself was a pagan, an erring man[6] (*dāll*), before he began to receive Revelation.

Be this as it may, the fact that in the Qur'anic thought the concept of *ummiyyūn* is most closely related with (1) that of *kitāb* (the Book)--that is, in short, Revelation—and (2) that of *rasūl* (the

Messenger) who is charged with the task of transmitting the Book to his people, and (3) the idea that the people before Revelation are in the state of *dalāl* (erring), is shown by the following verse:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولاً مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ، وَإِن كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ﴾

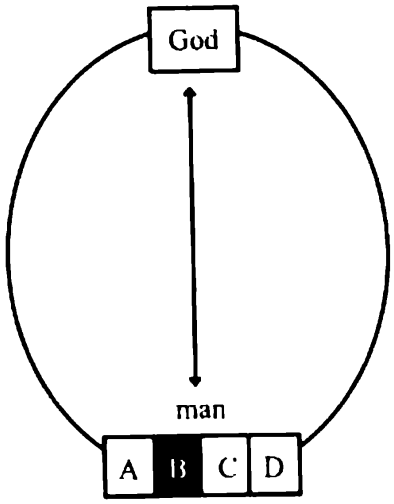
He it is who has sent among the ummiyyūn a Messenger (rasūl) from among them, so that he might recite His revelations to them, purify them, and teach them the Book (kitāb) and the Wisdom, while heretofore they were clearly in error (dalāl).

All this would seem to imply an extremely important thing, namely, that, according to the Qur'an, the Arabs, who had been one of the *ummī* peoples, were raised by the 'Arabic' Revelation for the first time in their history to the rank of a People of Scripture. The concept of Islamic *ummah* is based on this thought. But the idea of the People of Scripture comprises many communities besides that of the Muslims, that are parallel to the latter, particularly the Jewish and Christian communities. And this situation makes it incumbent upon the youngest *ummah* to define its own position among the whole People of Scripture. Thus the idea is advanced that the Muslims are now "the best *ummah* ever produced for mankind"[7] and that God has made them "a middle *ummah*",[8] meaning thereby probably an *ummah* that occupies the central position in the whole, away from all the extremes that are represented by other communities within the People of Scripture.

As a matter of fact, the People of Scripture in pre-Islamic times, in the Qur'anic view, had conspicuously degenerated. Originally they were men of the true religion, who, following their prophets, believed in God and His words. By the time Islam arose, however, they had consciously falsified the truth that had been revealed to them by God, adopting some parts of it that pleased them, and rejecting or concealing others. In short, the original pure religion, which the Qur'an calls the "Hanīfitic religion" symbolized by Abraham, the monotheist, *hanīf*[9] had been corrupted into a kind of disbelief. Islam, according to what the Qur'an itself declares, was a movement for cleaning up these religious scandals with a view to reconstructing the true monotheism in its pure original form.

Thus we see that the relation of the Islamic *ummah* with the People of Scripture (*ahl al-kitāb*) is far from being a simple and straightforward one. On the one hand, the Islamic *ummah* stands closely affiliated with *ahl al-kitāb* the Jews and Christians in particular, but, on the other, they are opposed to each other with bitter enmity between them. And on the whole, this enmity becomes more and more conspicuous in course of time, and this process is clearly reflected in the history of the Qur'anic thought. In this sense, the conceptual opposition of the Islamic *ummah* and other People of Scripture is no less sharp than that of the Islamic *ummah* and the idolatrous *Kāfirs*. The diagram is intended to show the general situation of mankind, in the Qur'anic world-view, that resulted from the establishment of the Islamic *ummah*, which, again, was a result of the establishment of the four basic relations between God and the Arabs through Muhammad the Prophet. It is to be remarked that here again the whole system is clearly based on the principle of multiple conceptual opposition.

A= People of Scripture
B = Muslims
C = Hypocrites
D = *Kāfirs*



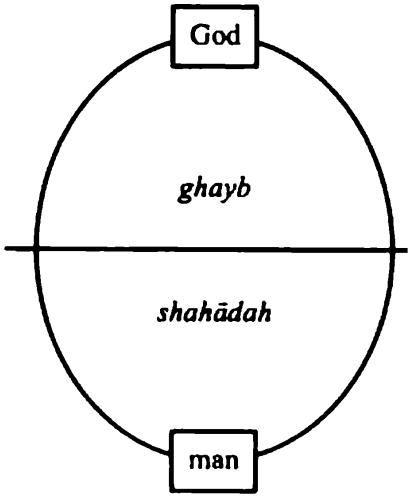
In the above diagram, the sector marked *B* symbolizes the Islamic *ummah*. It is worth noticing that the inner structure of this *ummah* as a social organization based on a new conception of society became soon a matter of grave concern to the believers who lived within it. This of course was a phenomenon peculiar to the period that followed the Hijrah, *i.e.* the Madīnan period, when the *ummah* first came into being. As everybody knows, the Islamic community, once established in Madīnah, grew larger at an astonishing speed and became more and more firmly consolidated in Arabia. This state of affairs is reflected in the Qur'an itself, and the problem of the inner structure of the Muslim community is dealt with in great detail in the

Sūrahs revealed in Madīnah in terms of the concepts of social system.

These concepts concern the laws and regulations governing the various human relations within the Islamic community. Unlike most of the Qur'anic key-terms that have to do with relations between God and man, the key-terms of this field express primarily relations between man and man in social life in this world. They constitute a large semantic field of social system. These concepts may be conveniently classified into seven sub-fields: (1) marital relations comprising concepts that relate to marriage, divorce, adultery and fornication; (2) parents-children relations, comprising the duties of parents towards children, and the duties of children towards their parents, and regulations concerning adoption; (3) laws of inheritance; (4) criminal laws concerning particularly murder, theft, and retaliation; (5) commercial relations comprising concepts of contract, debt, usury, bribery, and justice in commercial dealings; (6) laws concerning charity, *i.e.*, alms, legal and voluntary; (7) laws concerning slaves.

As is obvious, this vast network of words signifying various human relations within the closed community of Islam is destined to develop later into a grand-scale system of Islamic jurisprudence. And we could perhaps find the best place for discussing the key-concepts of this field when we come down, from the Qur'anic stage to the semantics of the vocabulary of Islamic Law, because there in the major systems of Law we find all of these concepts minutely analyzed by the Muslim thinkers themselves in a methodological way which is not so far removed from our semantical analysis.[10]

IV. The Unseen and the Visible



The Qur'anic view divides the present world in which man lives into two halves: "the Domain of the Unseen" (*'ālam al-ghayb*) and "the Domain of the Visible" (*'ālam al-shahādah*). This is the second major conceptual opposition discernible in the world-view of the Qur'an. And these are the two basic forms of the whole world of being, which is nothing but the main stage on which the aforesaid *divina*

commedia is enacted.

Of these two, only the visible part is at man's disposal, while God reigns over both of them, as we are told, for example, in Sūrah al-Zumar:

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ عَالِمَ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ﴾

Say: O Allah! Thou creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou who knowest the Unseen (al-ghayb) and the Visible (al-shahadah)!

Al-Zumar, 39:47 [46]

It is to be remarked that this distinction itself is meaningful only in reference to the basic epistemological capacity of the human mind. It is, in other words, a distinction made purely from the human point of view, for, from the standpoint of God, there can be no *ghayb* at all. He is omniscient, as the Qur'an declares so categorically and so repeatedly. "Allah encompasses everything in knowledge".[11] Thus, to take a typical example regarding the knowledge of the Hour (*al-sā'ah*),[12] *i.e.*, the knowledge as to when exactly the Day of Judgment would come, which was one of the paramount problems of the day for both the Muslims and the *Kāfirs*, they were told that Allah alone knew 'when', and no one else in the world, not even the Prophet himself.

﴿يَسْئَلُكَ النَّاسُ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِندَ اللَّهِ، وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّ السَّاعَةَ تَكُونُ قَرِيبًا﴾

Men will ask thee about the Hour. Answer: "The knowledge of it is with Allah". What can make thee know? It may be that the Hour is nigh.

Al-Aḥzāb, 33:63

When asked such a grave question concerning the *ghayb*, the Prophet should answer only in the following way:

﴿إِنْ أَدْرِي أَقَرِيبٌ مَا تُوعَدُونَ أَمْ يَجْعَلُ لَهُ رَبِّي أَمَدًا، عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلاَ يُظْهِرُ عَلَى غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا﴾

"I do not know whether that which you are promised is nigh, or whether my Lord will appoint a longer term for it. The Knower of the ghayb He is, and to none does He disclose His ghayb!"
Al-Jinn, 72:26 [26-26]

All this because man is so made to live in the world of the Visible (*shahādah*) alone. His knowledge does not go beyond the limit of his natural domain.

The words themselves, *ghayb* and *shahādah* in the sense of "the invisible" and "the visible" respectively, were not in any way unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs. *Jāhiliyyah* knew and used them. It is remarkable that even the expression *'ālam al-ghayb* occurs in a poem of a famous pre-Islamic poet 'Antarah b. Shaddād, for example, in the sense of the "unknown future":[13]

وَلاَ تَخْشَوْا مِمَّا يُقَدَّرُ فِي غَدٍ فَمَا جاءَنَا مِنْ عالِمِ الغَيْبِ مُخْبِرْ

Do not worry about what will be measured out to you tomorrow, for nobody has ever brought us any news from the world of *ghayb*.

But more generally, the word in *Jāhilī* literature means things that bit beyond the power of human perception in the most material sense. The following verse by a poet[14] of the Hudhayl tribe describes a wild bull chased by a hunter, whose presence the former perceives by the ear, but not by the eye.

يَرْمِي بِعَيْنِهِ الغُيُوبَ وَطَرْفُهُ مُغْضٍ يُصَدِّقُ طَرْفُهُ مَا يَسْمَعُ

He tries to discern with his eyes what is hidden in the invisible (*i.e.* in a place which he is unable to see through), compressing tight his eyelids, and his eyesight confirms what his ears have heard.

The same word is often used in the sense of "what is hidden in the heart", "what is kept secret in the heart". For example, al-Hutay'ah says:[15]

لَمَّا بدَا لِي مِنْكُمْ غَيْبُ أَنْفسِكُمْ

"When at last the real sentiment which had been kept secret in your heart became disclosed to me...", meaning thereby the hidden

hatred towards him.

But there seems to be no trace in pre-Islamic heathenism of the word's having been used in a religious sense. The same is true of its positive counterpart, *shahādah*, the basic meaning of which is "to be present in one's own person at an event, and be witnessing what actually happens".[16]

V. The Present World and the Hereafter

From an entirely different point of view, this world as man actually experiences it and lives in it is, as a whole, called *al-dunyā*, lit. 'the Lower' or 'the Nearer' world. The Qur'an mostly uses the phrase *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* ('the lower life') in place of the simple word *al-dunyā*. The denotatum of this word in the Qur'an is the same world of being and existence which we have symbolized above by a circle with 'God' and 'man' as two points of reference. In other terms, it denotes the same main stage of the *divina commedia* on which God and man come into contact with each other in the four major types of relation as distinguished above. Only, the angle from which it is viewed is now quite different from the preceding one.

To understand this point it will be enough to notice that the word *al-dunyā* belongs to a particular category of words, which we might call 'correlation' words, that is, those words that stand for correlated concepts, like 'husband' and 'wife', 'brother' and 'sister', *etc.*: each member of the pair presupposes the other semantically and stands on the very basis of this correlation. A man can be a 'husband' only in reference to 'wife'. The concept of 'husband', in other words, implicitly contains that of 'wife', and vice versa. In just the same way, the concept of *al-dunyā* presupposes the concept of the 'world to come', *i.e.*, the 'Hereafter' (*al-ākhirah*), and stands in contrast to it. And the Qur'an is very conscious of this correlation whenever it uses either of the two words, not to speak of those frequent cases where both are mentioned together in the same breath, as, for example, in the following verse:

﴿تُرِيدُونَ عَرَضَ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ يُرِيدُ الْآخِرَةَ﴾

You desire the ephemeral goods of the present world (al-dunyā),

while God desires (for you) the Hereafter (al-ākhirah).
Al-Anfāl, 8:68 [67]

The word *al-dunyā* occurs frequently, in pre-Islamic literature. And this very fact would seem to suggest that the correlate concept of *ākhirah* was also known to the pre-Islamic Arabs. The famous authority on pre-Islamic poetry al-Aṣma'ī (740-828) is often quoted as saying: "the major subject of 'Antarah was *ḥarb* (war), that of 'Umar b. Abī Rabī'ah was *shabāb* (youth, always associated with love and the pursuit of sensual pleasures), while the main subject of Ummayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt was *al-ākhirah* (the Hereafter)."

The fact that here the 'Hereafter' is put in close connection with Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt[17] would suggest that this concept, and consequently that of *al-dunyā*, too, were most probably propagated in pre-Islamic Arabia first by Judaism and Christianity. To look on the present world as something 'lower' is possible only where there is firmly established the idea of the Other World being far more valuable and important than the present world. Such a view is surely not of the pure Arabian paganism, whose fundamental outlook on human existence may be aptly described as 'pessimistic hedonism' stemming from the deep-seated conviction that there can be absolutely nothing after death. This typically *Jāhilī* view of life we find well epitomized in a verse like this:[18]

نُسَلِّ مَلاَمَاتِ الرِّجَالِ بِرَيَّةٍ وَنَفْرِ شُرُورَ الأَيَّامِ بِاللَّهْوِ واللَّعِبِ

Let us forget reproachful words of the people with cups abrim, and cut away the ills of the Day with jest and joy.

It is evident that the disparaging view of the present world, that is, to look on *Dunyā* as literally *dunyā* (lower), belongs properly to a spiritual religion. That such a view of *Dunyā* was very common in the Christian circles in and around Arabia in ancient times may be easily seen by even a cursory inspection of the history of Christian literature in Arabic. Here I will give a typical example.

The famous princess of the Christian Court of al-Ḥīrah, Ḥurqah, daughter of the last king of this dynasty al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir, and noted for her excellent personality as well as for her poetic talent, is related to have recited a poem which begins with the

following two lines in the presence of the Muslim general Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās, when he defeated the Persians at al-Qādisiyyah:[19]

بَيْنَا نَسُوسُ النَّاسَ والأَمْرُ أَمْرُنَا إِذَا نَحْنُ فِيهِمْ سُوقَةٌ نَتَنَصَّفُ
فَأُفٍّ لِـدُنْيَا لاَ يَـدُومُ نَعِيمُهَا تَقَلَّبُ تَـارَاتٍ بِنَا وَتَصَـرَّفُ

The meaning of the verses is somewhat like this:
We have been ruling the people with an absolute authority in our hands, when, all of a sudden we find ourselves changed into their subjects who must serve them. Alas, how detestable is the *Dunyā* in which no happiness lasts for long! The *Dunyā* tosses us about in its shifts and changes, itself being in perpetual ebb and flow.

However this may be, the word *al-dunyā* itself seems to have been widely used among the pre-Islamic Arabs even outside the monotheistic circles, although it is extremely doubtful whether any religious value was attached to the concept. In the following verse, for instance, the poet[20] recognizes in the *Dunyā* something inspiring confidence, worthy to be relied upon, and therefore, positively valuable.

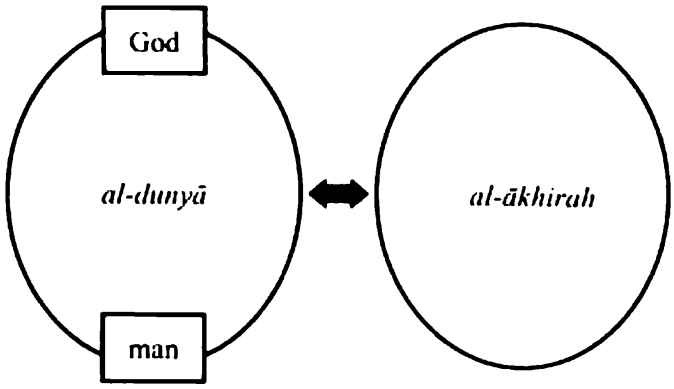
تَـزَوَّدْ مِـنَ الدُّنْيَا مَتَاعاً فَإِنَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ خَيْرُ زَادِ الْمُزَوِّدِ

Supply yourself for your journey (*viz.* of life) with the goods of the *Dunyā*, for, surely, they are, whatever happens, the best provision for a man preparing for a journey.

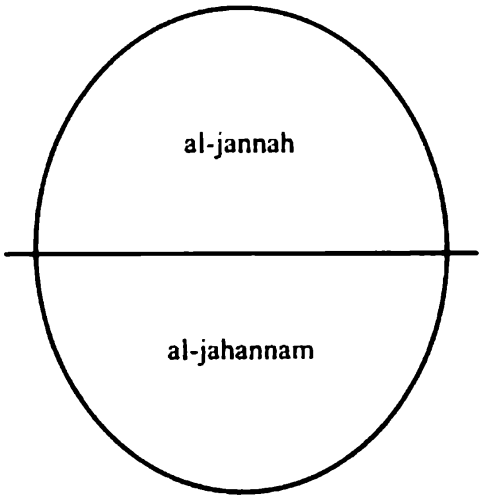
There may be in this verse some vague consciousness of the basic correlation between the *Dunyā* and the Other World still lingering on, but in the next one by 'Antarah there is no longer any trace of such consciousness discernible:[21]

إِذَاً نِعَبْلَةَ مِنْ فَرْطِ وَجْـدِي وَأَجْعَلُهَا مِـنَ الدُّنْيَا اهْتِمَامِي

From the excess of passionate love, I lower myself to (my beloved) 'Ablah (*i.e.* I content myself with being a "slave" of 'Ablah), and of all things of the *Dunyā* I make her the sole concern of mine.



As we have seen above, the Qur'an re-establishes this conceptual correlation in its original form, and puts afresh these two concepts into direct opposition to each other. And this is the third of the major conceptual oppositions which, as I said, contribute towards creating the intense atmosphere of spiritual tension that characterizes the *weltanschauung* of the Qur'an.



As regards the conceptual structure of *al-ākhirah* itself, we should remark that it is also based on the principle of dichotomy, *i.e.*, here again we see a basic opposition of two major concepts: the Garden (*al-jannah*, pl. *al-jannāt*) and the Hell Fire (*al-jahannam*). And this determines the general structure of this field. The conception of the Hereafter in this form does not, in the nature of the case, appear very often in pre-Islamic poetry, but it would be too rash to say that it was completely unknown. As a matter of fact, in view of the cultural situation of Arabia in late *Jāhiliyyah* we should rather expect to meet with such a conception among the Arabs. There is one interesting example in 'Antarah's *Dīwān*. Describing his love-affair with 'Ablah, the poet says:

نَعِيمُ وَصْلِكِ جَنَّاتٌ مُزَخْرَفَةٌ وَنَارُ هَجْرِكِ لاَ تُبْقِي وَلاَ تَذَرُ

The bliss of being united with you is a heavenly garden (*jannāt*) beautifully adorned, while the fire of being separated from you burns out everything, leaving nothing behind.[22]

It is interesting to note that the poet here compares the unbearable torment of separation to the scorching Fire of Hell that burns to ashes everything that is thrown into it. Although he does not actually use the word *jahannam*, 'Hell' in this verse, the image is palpably there. And this, if the verse is genuine, would be indicative of a strong influence on the pre-Islamic world-view of the Judeo-Christian religious imagery. Besides, such indications are far from being rare in pre-Islamic literature.

In any case, the word itself *jahannam* occurs in the *Dīwān* of the same poet. This is rather an exceptional case.

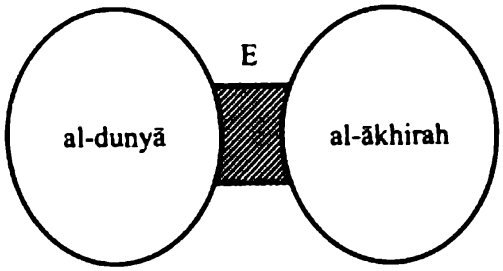
مَاءُ الْحَيَاةِ بِذِلَّةٍ كَجَهَنَّمٍ وَجَهَنَّمٌ بِالْعِزِّ أَطْيَبُ مَنْزِلِ

The taste of the water of life in abjection is like *Jahannam*, while even *Jahannam*, if only one lives there in glory and power, is an abode sweet and delightful.[23]

There is a point which is extremely important as regards the position of the concepts of *jannah* and *jahannam*. This conceptual pair is not there in the Qur'anic image of the Hereafter simply as something lying far away from this present world. On the contrary, it is most directly and immediately connected the human life on this earth, in this very present world. The two concepts are not only directly connected with that of *al-dunyā*; the whole system is arranged in such a way that they work directly upon the life of the *Dunyā* and control it in terms of the eternal 'Reward' and 'Punishment'. The presence of *jannah* and *jahannam* must make itself felt in the form of the moral conscience whenever a man does something, whenever a man acts in this world. It is the very source of the moral values. Man, as long as he lives as a member of the Muslim community, is morally demanded to choose always certain ways of acting that are connected with *jannah*, and to avoid those that are connected with *jahannam*. This is the very simple and very vigorous principle of moral conduct in this new community.

So here again we meet with that phenomenon of the re-evaluation and reassessment of old concepts in Islam. The concepts themselves of *jannah* and *jahannam* might very well have been known to the *Jāhilī* Arabs, but the position they occupied in the *Jāhilī* conceptual system was quite peripheral, so peripheral that they were not even key-terms. In the Qur'an, they are given an entirely different place in an entirely different semantic field. Now they are key-terms of central importance; they represent in clear imagery the good and the bad, and the right and the wrong on this earth as God Himself defines them.

VI. Eschatological Concepts



Between the *Dunyā* and the Hereafter the Qur'an puts something that acts as a connecting link, something representing the transition stage between the two worlds (The sector *E* in the diagram). It is a particular group of concepts that we may roughly classify as eschatological concepts: The Last Day, the Day of Judgment, Resurrection, Reckoning and similar ones.

Of all the concepts that fall under this category, the most controversial among the Makkans in the first days of Islam was that of the resurrection of the dead. Many of them responded with sheer denial and scorn to the Qur'anic message of the resurrection connected with the concept of the Judgment of the Last Day. "Who shall quicken the bones when they have rotted off?"[24]—this brief sentence summarizes their attitude toward this conception. For them it was sheer nonsense that they would come to life again in a bodily form long after they had become decayed bones. Often they dismissed the teachings as "old fables"[25] and "nightmare illusions";[26] if such a thing did happen, they said, it would be "nothing but a magic manifest".[27]

This attitude toward the concept of bodily resurrection has

evidently its root and source in the more general and more fundamental world-view of those people to which the Qur'an makes a clear reference in an oft-quoted passage which runs:

﴿وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلاَّ حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلاَّ الدَّهْرُ﴾

They say: there is nothing but this present life of ours; we die and we live, and it is only Time that destroys us.

Al-Jāthiyah, 45:23 [24]

Such was, indeed, the typical, representative attitude of the Makkans on the problem of resurrection raised by the Qur'an in an uncompromising way. At bottom there is a deep tone of nihilism here; nihilism coming from the keenest consciousness that there can be nothing beyond the grave. The same nihilism which, as we have seen, drove the Arabs of the desert to hedonism, manifested itself with the Makkans, under the form of an intense and exclusive concentration on the prosperity in this world. They were, in short, clever able merchants, worldly-minded businessmen who had no wish at all to learn about the future life and the Last Day, because in their eyes there could be no such things. The negative attitude of the Makkans toward the Qur'anic concept of resurrection can easily be understood in terms of this businessman mentality. It was the direct outgrowth of the self-confidence—*istighnā'*, lit. "the thinking of one's self independent" as the Qur'an calls it—of the prospering merchants.

However, it would be dangerous to generalize it and say that the concept of resurrection was unknown in *Jāhiliyyah*. There are certain undeniable traces in pre-Islamic poetry of a belief in the Hereafter associated with the idea of the Day of Reckoning beyond the grave. Some of them may quite reasonably be traced back to a Christian or Jewish source. The very famous verses (vv. 27-28) in the *Mu'allaqah* of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā, in which there is an explicit reference to the Heavenly Record (*kitāb*) which registers all evil actions of men for the Day of Reckoning (*yawm al-ḥisāb*) furnish an outstanding example.

فَلاَ تَكْتُمُنَّ اللهَ مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمْ لِيَخْفَى وَمَهْمَا يُكْتَمِ اللهَ يَعْلَمِ
يُؤَخَّرْ فَيُوضَعْ فِي كِتَابٍ فَيُدَّخَرْ لِيَوْمِ الْحِسَابِ أَوْ يُعَجَّلْ فَيُنْقَمِ

The verses mean literary:

Never try to hide from Allah what is within your breast (*i.e.* whatever evil thoughts you nourish secretly) so that it might not be disclosed, for whatever is concealed from God, He knows. It (*i.e.* the Divine punishment) may be deferred and (your evil) set down in the Book and kept for the Day of Reckoning, or it may be accelerated (*i.e.* be inflicted already in the present world) and vengeance taken; (in any case, you will never be able to escape Divine punishment for any wrong you have done).

A generation or two ago, it was fashionable among the Orientalists to explain away these and other similar verses in pre-Islamic poetry—and the examples are far more numerous than one might expect—as due to interpolation and forgery by later Muslim philologists. We have learnt to be much more cautious this matter. Instead of emphasizing the occurrence of ideas of this kind in *Jāhiliyyah* as a strong argument against the authenticity of its literature, we are today inclined to take it rather as a confirmation of the view that the intellectual atmosphere of Arabia in late *Jāhiliyyah* was not at all purely pagan, but was in general permeated by monotheistic ideas, for, as we shall see in the next chapter, such ideas are clearly presupposed by the Qur'an itself in its refutation of the *Kāfirs'* view on Allah.

As regards Zuhayr's verses just quoted, which, by the way, Ibn Qutaybah in his *Book on Poetry and Poets* considers an indication that this poet believed in the Resurrection, and which modern scholars have tended to explain away as forgery, I think the truth of the matter becomes clear when we reflect a little on the general situation in which Zuhayr composed this poem.

The tribes to whom Zuhayr addressed these words were, as Charles Lyall[28] pointed out long ago, living in the midst of people who were well familiar with Christian and Jewish religious ideas. To the west and north were Yathrib, Khaybar and Taymā', all flourishing Jewish centers, to the north the tribe of Kalb, almost entirely Christian, and Tayyi' where Christianity was spreading steadily. In such a cultural situation there is nothing strange about the fact that some Biblical ideas appear as important concepts in Zuhayr's poems.

This, of course, should not be taken to mean that the Arabs before the advent of Islam were, in general and as a whole, already quite familiar with the major religious concepts of Judeo-Christian

origin. Even those of the Judeo-Christian concepts that were relatively well-known among the pagan Arabs not evidently form the genuine *Jāhilī weltanschauung*. The notion of Resurrection entertained by the ordinary Arabs of the desert were also presumably a far vaguer and weaker one than that expressed by Zuhayr in the lines we have examined. And yet the presence itself of notions of this kind among them is also difficult to deny. The evidence is not far to seek.

All readers of the Qur'an know that in this Book the idea of the resurrection of the dead body is expressed usually by words like *ba'th* (verb *ba'atha)* and *nashr* (verb *anshara*). In the Qur'an, we meet with the *Kāfirs* saying:

﴿وَقَالُوا إِنْ هِيَ إِلاَّ حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَبْعُوثِينَ﴾

"*There is only our present life, and we shall never be raised from (mab'ūthīna* from *ba'atha)*".

Al-An'ām, 6:29

﴿إِنْ هِيَ إِلاَّ مَوْتَتُنَا الأُولَى وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُنشَرِينَ﴾

"*There is nothing but our first death; we shall never be raised from (munsharina* from *anshara)*".

Al-Dukhān, 44:34 [35]

This negation itself of *ba'th* and *nashr* would be unthinkable without supposing that the *Kāfirs* did possess from the beginning the concepts of *ba'th* and *nashr* understood in the sense of the resurrection of the dead. Generally speaking, you can only negate a word when you know what it means. This view is confirmed by a similar usage of these words by pre-Islamic Arabs. For example, al-Shaddākh b. Ya'mar, a *Jāhilī* poet, says:[29]

القَـــوْمُ أَمْثَالُـكُمْ لَـهُمْ شَعَرٌ فِـي الرَّأْسِ لاَ يُنْشَرُونَ إِنْ قُتِلُوا

The poet is here trying to encourage his tribesmen who are flinching from attacking their powerful enemy, saying that "our enemies are also ordinary like you, who have hair on their heads, and who will never be revived (*nashr*) once they are killed". The expression "they will never be revived" would be completely

pointless and meaningless if the concept of *nashr* (resurrection) were unknown.

The word *hashr* is more characteristic, because it means precisely resurrection on the Day of Judgement. 'Antarah talks proudly of his glorious fame as a warrior which will last till the time of General Assembly.[30] And Salmah al-Ju'fī, a *Mukhaḍram* poet, bewailing the death of his brother says:[31]

وَكُنْتُ أَرَى كَالْمَوْتِ مِنْ بَيْنِ لَيْلَةٍ فَكَيْفَ بِبَيْنٍ كَانَ مِيعَادَهُ الْحَشْرُ

I used to suffer something like death from even the separation of one day; can I endure a long separation which comes to an end only by meeting again on the day of resurrection (*hashr*)?

We may also point out in this connection a very interesting heathen custom, *baliyyah* as something indicative of the existence in *Jāhiliyyah* of a belief in resurrection. In the days of Arabian paganism, when a man died, his riding camel was tied up at his grave, her eyes plucked out, her fore-shank bound to the upper arm, and she was left there without food and water till she died. The custom referred to very often in Arabic literature. An example will suffice here.[32]

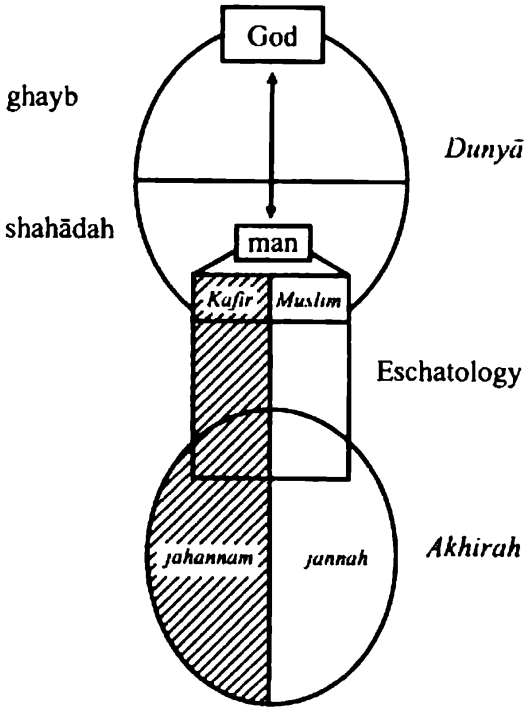
أَوْ مَنْ لأَشْعَثَ بَعْلِ أَرْمَلَةٍ مِثْلِ الْبَلِيَّةِ سَمْلَةِ الْهِدْمِ

Now who will help this miserable fellow, husband of a starving woman, (lean) as a *baliyyah*-camel, and clad in rags?

According to the explanation given by the Arab authorities of the Abbasid period, the pre-Islamic Arabs kept up this old custom because they believed that the dead man would ride upon his camel thus starved to death by the grave of her master and come to the place of Gathering (*mahshar*) on the Resurrection Day.

Without giving full credit to this kind of explanation, we may be fairly confident in concluding from what we have seen that the pre-Islamic Arabs had at least a vague notion of Resurrection and the Judgment Day. Only, as in the case of all other major religious concepts, it was not given a definite place in a definite system of concepts. This and similar concepts were simply there, scattered about here and there, with no coherent internal connection between

them. This means that although there were eschatological concepts in *Jāhiliyyah*, there was no clearly defined and solidly established semantic field of eschatology as a middle field between the *Dunyā* and the Hereafter. In any society, there are a number of stray concepts having no definite semantic field to belong in. Concepts of this sort, lacking support from any strong coherent systems of concepts, are weak and cannot in any way play a decisive role in the culture. This is the most fundamental difference between the pre-Islamic concepts of eschatology and the Qur'anic ones.



By way of conclusion I would give here in a simple diagrammatic form the general structure of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*, to which we have been led by this preliminary analysis. This furnishes us with a general framework in which every Qur'anic key-concept will be given a proper place. In the following chapter only the semantical structure of the first—but patently the most important—part of this whole system will be dealt with. In other words, we shall be engaged in examining in detail the structure of the *Dunyā* in terms of the fourfold relation between God and man, which we mentioned at the beginning of the present chapter.

Notes

1. I quite agree with Dr. Daud Rahbar when he says (*op. cit.*, p. 721) that "what is expected of a great book of revelation is not absolute logical consistency, but consistency of the dominance of an idea. Prophets do not offer philosophy. They offer wisdom of a type, a wisdom which has a dominant note". The search after the dominant note in this sense is our task. Only, this can be done by many different ways and methods, and semantics is one of them.
2. As regards these four basic forms of God-man relation, we have to be content with this synopsis at this stage. We leave the problem here without any further explanation, for it will form our main topic all through the remaining chapters. As to the other aspects of the general Qur'anic world-view, that we are going to mention in the present chapter, some details will be given in view of the fact that they will not be dealt with properly in this book.
3. ﴿رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمَيْنِ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُّسْلِمَةً لَّكَ﴾

   Our Lord, make us submissive to Thee, and of our seed a community submissive Thee! (It is Abraham who addresses these words to God) (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:122 [128])
4. The relevance of this concept is in no way restricted to the period we are dealing witht in this book; it extends into all corners of Islamic history, as Sir Hamliton A. R. Gibb writes: "The key word for everything that has to do with Islamic culture is *Umma* Community. It is in the historical development of this concept and its modalities that true significance of Islamic history and culture must be sought", ("The Community in Islamic History", in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 108, 1963, p.173)
5. For an analysis of the concept of religious hypocricy, see *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, chapter XI.
6. وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى "(God) found thee erring (away from the right path) and guided thee". (90:7).
7. ﴿كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ﴾

   You are the best community ever produced for mankind, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, and believing in God. (*Āli 'Imrān*, 3:106 [110])
8. ﴿وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِّتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ﴾

   Likewise We made you a middle ummah, that you might be witnesses to all people. (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:137 [143]).

9. On this important term, see the next chapter, section V.
10. Those who are particularly interested in the Qur'anic concepts of social system may obtain a general introductory knowledge from *The Social Laws of the Qur'ān* by Robert Roberts, London, 1925, although the investigation is not conducted from a semantical point of view. For a more detailed survey of the subject, I would recommend Muḥammad Darwaza's book, *al-Dustūr al-Qur'ānī fī Shu'ūn al-Ḥayāh*, Cairo, 1956.
11. ﴿وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا﴾ (65:12)
12. See above, Chapter I, section II.
13. *Dīwān 'Antarah*, p. 83, v. 4.
14. *Dīwān al-Hudhaliyyīn*, I, Cairo, 1945, p. 1945, p. II, v. 2. The poet is Abū Dhu'ayb. The word *ghayb* appears in this verse in the plural form, *ghuyūb*.
15. Al-Ḥuṭay'ah, a *Mukhadram* poet. *al-Majānī al-Hadīthah*, by al-Bustānī, II., p. 37.
16. The contrast between *shahādah* and *ghayb* in this sense is most clearly observable in a verse by a Hudhayl poet Ma'qil b. Khuwaylid (*Dīwān al-Hudhaliyyīn*, III, Cairo, 1950, p. 70, v. 3).
17. On this poet and his singularly monotheistic thought, see the next chapter, section V.
18. The poet is Iyās b. al-Aratt, *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah* CDLXXXV, 2. It is quite interesting to note that the same words *lahw* (jesting, diversion), and *la'ib* (sporting) occur in this combination also in the Qur'an, but with a completely reversed intention, *i.e.*, the intention of disparaging the so-called goods of the present world:

﴿وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلاَّ لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَلَلدَّارُ الآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ، أَفَلاَ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

The life of the present world is naught but a pastime and diversion. Surely far better is the Abode of the Hereafter for those who are godfearing. Do you not understand? (*Al-An'ām*, 6:32). See also 57:19-20 [20].
19. *Al-Ḥamāsah*, CDXLIX, 1-2.
20. 'Abīd b. al-Abras, *Dīwān*, Beirut, 1958, XV, 28.
21. 'Antarah, *Dīwān*, p. 168, v. 14.
22. 'Antarah, *Dīwān*, p. 80, v. 8.
23. *Ibid.* p. 135, v. 10.
24. مَن يُحْيِي الْعِظَامَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ (36:28)
25. أَسَاطِيرُ الأَوَّلِينَ (83:73)

26. أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلاَمٍ (21:5)
27. إِنْ هَذَا إِلاَّ سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ (11:10 [7])
28. Charles Lyall, *Ancient Arabian Poetry*, London, 1930, in the explanatory notes on this *Mu'allaqah* pp. 119-120.
29. *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah*, XL, 2.
30. 'Antarah, *Dīwān*, p. 80, v. 12 «[ذِكْرٌ] يَدُومُ إِلَى أَوَانِ الْمَحْشَرِ»
31. *Al-Ḥamāsah*, CCCLXXXV, 3.
32. The poet is al-Jumayḥ al-Asadī. *Dīwān al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, Cairo, 1942, CIX, v. 13, p. 368. See also *Mu'allaqah* of Hārith, v. 14.

CHAPTER 4

Allah

I. The Word *Allāh*, its 'Basic' and 'Relational' Meanings

As I have pointed out repeatedly in the course of the previous account, *Allāh* is the highest 'focus-word' in the Qur'anic system, which is surpassed by no other word in rank and importance. The *weltanschauung* of the Qur'an is essentially theocentric, and quite naturally in this system the concept of Allah reigns over the whole from above, and exerts a deep influence on the semantic structure of all the key-words. Whatever aspect of the Qur'anic thought one may wish to study, it is necessary that one should have from the outset a clear idea as to how this concept is structured semantically. This is why I have decided to devote a whole chapter to a somewhat detailed analysis of the concept before entering upon the consideration of our major problem, that of the fourfold relation between God and man. It goes without saying that the real semantic structure of the word *Allāh* will become fully clear only after we have analyzed this God-man relation, because, as I said at the beginning of the last chapter, God in the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* does not subsist in His glorious self-sufficing solitude and stand aloof from mankind as does the God of Greek philosophy, but deeply involves Himself in human affairs. Leaving this latter aspect of the problem to the following chapters, I would like to concentrate on the present chapter on the more specific subject of the pre-Qur'anic history of the concept of Allah. This will put us in a better position to see what is original in the Islamic concept of God, and will thereby serve as a good preliminary

to the analysis that will come later of the fundamental relation between God and man in the Qur'anic thought.

Let us begin by remarking that the name itself of *Allāh* is common to *Jāhiliyyah* and Islam. When, in other words, the Qur'anic Revelation began to use this word, it was not introducing a new name of God, a name strange and alien to the ears of the contemporary Arabs. The first problem, then, that we must answer is: Was the Qur'anic concept of Allah a continuation of the pre-Islamic one, or did the former represent a complete break with the latter? Were there some essential—not accidental—ties between the two concepts signified by one and the same name? Or was it a simple matter of a common word used for two different objects?

In order to give a satisfactory answer to these initial questions, we will do well to remember the fact that, when the Qur'an began to use this name, there immediately arose serious debates among the Arabs of Makkah. The Qur'anic usage of the word provoked stormy discussions over the nature of this God between the Muslims and *Kāfirs* as is most eloquently attested by the Qur'an itself.

What does this mean from the semantical point of view? What are the implications of the fact that the name of Allah was not only known to both parties in their discussion but was actually used by both parties in their discussion with each other? The very fact that the name of Allah was common to both the pagan Arabs and Muslims, particularly the fact that it gave rise to much heated discussion about the concept of God, would seem to suggest conclusively that there was some common ground of understanding between the two parties. Otherwise there could have been neither debate nor discussion at all. And when the Prophet addressed his adversaries in the name of Allah, he did so simply and solely because he knew that this name meant something—and something important—to their minds too. If this were not so, his activity would have been quite pointless in this respect.

Speaking more generally, a name, *i.e.*, a word, is a symbol of something; a name is always the name of something. So when a man addresses another using a particular word and the latter understands his speech and even gives a retort, we may reasonably suppose that the name points at least to some conceptual element which is common to both parties, however much they may differ from each other in their understanding of the name as regards all other elements.

And this common semantic element in our particular case must have been something referring to an extremely important aspect of the concept of Allah, seeing that it raised such a keen and crucial issue among the Arabs of that time.

Now the problem is: What was this common element? We may answer this question conveniently in terms of the methodological distinction between 'basic' and 'relational' meaning. In other words, the common semantic element of which we are talking now may be sought for in two different directions

Let us begin with the 'basic' side of the matter, keeping well in mind that the 'basic' meaning does not exhaust the common element in question.

As regards the 'basic' meaning of *Allāh*, we may remark that many Western scholars have compared rightly—to my mind—the word in its formal aspect with the Greek *ho theos* which means quite simply "the God". On such an abstract level the name was common to all Arab tribes. In pre-Islamic times each tribe, as a rule, had its own local god or divinity known by a proper name. So, at first, each tribe may have meant its own local divinity when it used an expression equivalent in meaning to "*the* God"; this is quite probable. But the very fact that people began to designate their own local divinity by the abstract form of "*the* God" must have paved the way for the growth of an abstract notion of God without any localizing qualification and then, following this, for a belief in the supreme God common to all the tribes. We meet with similar instances all over the world.

Besides, we must remember, there were the Jews and the Christians with whom the Arabs had constant opportunities of a close cultural contact. And naturally these Jews and Christians both used the same word *Allāh* to denote their own Biblical God. This must have exerted a great influence on the development of the pre-Islamic concept of Allah among the Arabs towards a higher concept than that of a mere tribal divinity, not only among the town dwellers but also among the pure Bedouins of the desert.

However this may be, it is certain from the Qur'an alone, that by the time Muḥammad began to preach, the pagan Arabs had come to cherish at least a vague idea, and perhaps also a vague belief in Allah as the highest God standing above the level of local idols.

Thus much we may reasonably assume as the 'basic' meaning

of the word *Allāh* in *Jāhiliyyah*. And this much meaning, at least, must the word have carried into the Islamic system when the Qur'an began to use it as the name of the God of Islamic Revelation. For otherwise, as I have said, even a polemic discussion on this Islamic God could not have been possible between the Muslims and the Makkan pagans.

However, this is not the whole picture. We would commit a grave mistake if we imagined that this 'basic' meaning was the sole point of contact between the two conceptions of God. The thing did not occur in such a way that the pure concept of Allah with its simple 'basic' meaning, which is suggested by its formal structure—*Allāh=ho theos*—came straight into the Islamic conceptual system falling down, so to speak, from some metaphysical world of pure concepts. But actually, *i.e.* historically, it came into the Islamic system through another system, namely, the pre-Islamic system of religious concepts, however crude the latter might have been. Before the name came into Islam, it had already long been part of the pre-Islamic system, and a considerably important part, too.

What does this fact imply semantically? It implies before anything that this word, in addition to its 'basic' meaning, had acquired in the *Jāhilī* system a great deal of 'relational' meaning peculiar to the *Jāhilī weltanschauung*. And all these 'relational' elements must have been present in the minds of the people of Makkah who listened to the Qur'anic recitation, at least in the first period of Muḥammad's prophetic career, because they were still completely heathen, and were still living in the old traditional *Jāhilī* system of concepts. To put it in another way, when the Islamic Revelation began, the pagan Arabs of Makkah could possibly have no other way of understanding the word *Allāh* than by associating with it all the semantic elements that were already present in their minds. This was the first big semantic problem which faced the Prophet Muḥammad when he started his prophetic career.

Now the problem is: What were these relational semantic elements which the word had acquired in the *Jāhilī* system? And how did Islam react to them? Did it reject them altogether as essentially incompatible with the new conception of God, as one might be tempted to suppose? All the historical evidence that has come down to us speaks eloquently against this view. Since *Jāhiliyyah* and Islam have always been put in sharp contrast, we are almost instinctively

inclined to think that there must have occurred a complete break in every respect between the two when Islam arose. However, the Qur'an itself bears abundant testimony to the fact that the matter was not so simple.

Certainly, of all the 'relational' elements that had grown around the concept of Allah in the system of *Jāhiliyyah*, Islam found some quite erroneous, incompatible with its new religious conception, and it fought strenuously against them and against those who upheld them. The chief of those objectionable elements was the idea that Allah, although admittedly the supreme God, allowed the existence of so-called 'associates' (*shurakā'*) besides Him.

But apart from this polytheistic element and some other less important points, the Qur'an acknowledges that the general concept of Allah entertained by the contemporary Arabs was surprisingly close to the Islamic concept of God. The Qur'an even wonders in a number of important verses why the people who have such a right understanding of God can be so obstinate in refusing to admit the truth of the new teaching, as we shall see presently.

In considering the problem of the development among the pre-Islamic Arabs of the 'relational' meaning of the word *Allāh*, I think it is essential that we should distinguish between three different cases and examine the matter very carefully from the three different angles.

I. The first is the pagan concept of Allah, which is purely Arabian—the case in which we see the pre-Islamic Arabs themselves talking about "*Allāh*" as they understand the word in their own peculiar way. The interesting point is that pre-Islamic literature is not the only source of information we have at hand on the subject; full first-hand information is obtainable from an extremely vivid description of the actual situation given by the Qur'an itself.

II. The case in which we observe the Jews and the Christians of pre-Islamic times using the very word *Allāh* in referring to their own God. In this case '*Allah*' means of course the God of the Bible, a typically monotheistic concept of God. Exceedingly interesting examples are found in this respect, for instance, in the work of 'Adī b. Zayd, a well-known Arab Christian, the Court poet of al-Ḥīrah.

III. Lastly, the case in which we see the pagan Arabs—non-Christian, non-Jewish pure *Jāhilī* Arabs—handling the Biblical concept of God under the name of '*Allāh*'. This happens, for instance, when a Bedouin poet finds occasion, as he often does in

Jāhiliyyah, to compose a poem in praise of a Christian king, his patron. In such a case, he is using the word '*Allāh*', consciously or unconsciously, in the Christian sense and from the Christian point of view, despite the fact that he himself is a pagan. Quite apart from the problem as to how deep was the degree of the Arab understanding of the Christian concept of God in general, it is, I think undeniable that very often in such cases, particularly when the poet happened to be a man of keen intellectual curiosity like Nābighah and al-A'shā al-Akbar, or a man of a deep religious nature like Labīd, that considerable effort was exerted on their part, if not consciously and intentionally, at least unconsciously, to put themselves in a Christian position temporarily by a sort of empathy. And this empathic attitude, whether its core was a deep religious emotion or but a superficial understanding of a foreign belief, must have been powerful enough to influence the conception of God not only of the poet himself but more generally of his listeners, and thereby modify, in however slight and almost imperceptible a degree, the Arab concept of Allah in the direction of monotheism.

This last case is, as is easy to see, the most interesting and the most important of the three. But it seems to have escaped the attention of those who have dealt with the problem of the influence of Christianity on pre-Islamic Arabia.

In any case, these three different ways of approach seem to have been gradually moving in the last years of *Jāhiliyyah* towards a point of convergence; they were preparing the way for the coming of a new concept of Allah, that of Islam. It will be well to recall in this connection that the Arabs in the sixth and seventh centuries were no longer living in primitive cultural conditions as one might be tempted to imagine. On the contrary, Arabia at that time was an open stage of lively cultural contact and international competition between peoples of ancient civilization, and the Arabs themselves were beginning to take an active part in this competition, as we shall see more in detail later.[1] Under such conditions, we should rather be greatly surprised if the concept of God among the Arabs remained just as it had been in the days of primitive paganism.

To the three cases we have just mentioned we may add one more case—an extremely special one—which remained to the last independent of and somewhat aloof from, the others until Islam arose and brought it suddenly into the brilliant light of history. I am

thinking of the concept of Allah peculiar to a very particular group of men in *Jāhiliyyah*, known under the name Ḥanīfs, and represented by, in our case, by the poet Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt, who, although was neither a Jew nor a Christian, held religious ideas that were strikingly monotheistic in nature, and who must have made in many ways an important contribution to the permeation of Arabia by Jewish and Christian ideas. He was indeed an extraordinary figure in late *Jāhiliyyah*. And the way he used the word *Allāh* is most interesting from the Islamic point of view.

II. The Concept of Allah in Arabian Paganism

Let us now turn to the first of the four cases as distinguished above, that is, the autochthonous concept of God in pre-Islamic Arabia. I would begin by pointing out that even without having recourse to non-Qur'anic literature, that is, relying solely on the testimony of the Qur'an itself, we can ascertain the very important fact that not only did the concept of Allah exist in the religious view of the pre-Islamic Arabs, but, furthermore, the concept had already a well-developed inner structure of its own, namely:

1. Allah in this conception is the Creator of the world.
2. He is the Giver of rain, *i.e.*, more generally, the Giver of life to all living things on earth.
3. He is the One who presides over the most solemn oaths.
4. He is the object of what we might justly describe as 'momentary' or 'temporary' monotheism, the existence of which is evidenced by the recurring expression in the Qur'an "making (momentarily) their faith pure for Him alone".
5. Finally, Allah is the *Lord of Ka'bah*.

These five fundamental points are discernible in the structure of the concept of Allah in the *weltanschauung* of Arabian paganism; this we know by the testimony of the Qur'an. And of course no stronger testimony could there be on this point. These are, roughly speaking, the major elements of the relational meaning attached to the word *Allāh* in *Jāhiliyyah*, that the Qur'an did not find incompatible with its new religious conception. Here follows a brief explanation of these points.

As has been casually mentioned in the preceding section, the concept of Allah that was prevalent among the pre-Islamic Arabs on the eve of the Islamic era was, in general, surprisingly close in nature to the Islamic one, so close, indeed, that the Qur'an sometimes even wonders why such a right understanding of God does not finally lead the disbelievers to acknowledging the truth of the new teaching.

In Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, for example, we read:

﴿وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُم مَّنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ، لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ﴾

If you ask them (i.e. the pagan Arabs) "Who has created the heavens and the earth, and has imposed law and order upon the sun and the moon?" They will surely answer, "Allah!".

Al-Ankabūt, 29:61

And immediately following this passage.

﴿وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُم مَّن نَّزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الأَرْضَ مِن بَعْدِ مَوْتِهَا، لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ﴾

If you ask them "Who sends down rain from the sky and revives therewith the earth after it has been dead?" They will surely answer, "Allah!".

Al-Ankabūt, 29:63

Apparently, then, Allah was, already in the conception of the pre-Islamic Arabs the Creator of the world and the Giver of rain, *i.e.*, the giver of life to all that exists on earth. The only serious complaint brought against them by the Qur'an in this respect was that the pagans failed to draw the only reasonable conclusion from the acknowledgment of Allah's being the Creator of the heaven and the earth: that they should serve Allah alone and none else. The Qur'an expresses this sentiment by such phrases[2] as "How, then, can they be turned aside (from the right direction)?" and "But most of them do not know how to excercise their intellect (*i.e.* how to draw the right conclusion)".

Even of greater interest than this in this respect is the fourth of the above-mentioned points. It is a singular phenomenon which I have called 'temporary monotheism', and which the Qur'an describes by a no less singular phrase: "making their religion sincere, or pure,

for Him, *i.e.*, for Allah alone".

In many passages of the Qur'an we are told that the pagan Arabs, when they find themselves in danger of death, with almost no hope of escape, particularly on the sea, call upon Allah for help and "make their religion pure for Allah". Only one example may suffice.

﴿وَإِذَا غَشِيَهُم مَّوْجٌ كَالظُّلَلِ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ﴾

And when waves enshroud them like dark clouds, they cry unto Allah, making their faith pure for Him alone.

Luqmān, 31:31 [32]

It is indeed remarkable that this expression implies that in an emergency, when they really felt that their own life was in mortal danger, the pagan Arabs used to have recourse to 'temporary monotheism' apparently without any reflection on the grave implication of such an act. That the phrase "making one's religion pure for Allah" in contexts of this kind means what we might call 'momentary—or temporary—monotheism', and not simply 'sincerity' or 'earnestness' in one's prayer[3] is clearly shown by the fact that in the majority of the verses in which this expression is used the Qur'an adds the remark that these pagans, as soon as they reach the shore and feel sure of absolute safety, forget about all that has passed and begin again "to ascribe partners to Allah", *i.e.*, fall back into their original polytheism.

﴿فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ﴾

But when He brings them safe to land, behold, they begin to ascribe partners.

Al-Ankabūt, 29:65

That the *Jāhilī* Arabs were prone to neglect the worship of Allah in ordinary daily conditions, but were always reminded of His name whenever they found themselves in an unusual and serious situation is shown also by the fact that, according to the Qur'an, the most sacred and solemn oaths used to be sworn in *Jāhiliyyah* in the name of Allah.

وَأَقْسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ جَهْدَ أَيْمَانِهِمْ

And they swore by Allah their most earnest oath.

Fāṭir, 35:40 [42][4]

Of particular importance in determining the place occupied by Allah in the *Jāhilī* system of concepts is the fact that He was considered the 'Lord of Ka'bah', the highest sanctuary of Central Arabia. This we can prove by ample evidence from pre-Islamic poetry, but nothing, of course, can be more decisive and authoritative than the Qur'an itself. In the very famous Sūrah Quraysh which is admittedly one of the oldest pieces of Revelation, the Quraysh are urged strongly to worship "the Lord of this House",[5] who causes the two annual caravans, in winter and summer, to be equipped, and takes good care of them with a view to making them live in peace and security. Here the idea of Allah's being the Lord of Ka'bah is simply taken for granted as something natural and generally acknowledged. It suggests that at least the religiously more enlightened ones of the people of Makkah were conscious of worshipping Allah at this shrine.

Allah, in this particular capacity, was known among the pre-Islamic Arabs under the name of the "Lord of the House" (*Rabb al-Bayt*), "Lord of Ka'bah" (*Rabb al-Ka'bah*) or "Lord of Makkah" (*Rabb Makkah*). Pre-Islamic literature furnishes ample evidence to show that the conception of Allah as the Lord of Makkan sanctuary was exceedingly widespread among the Arabs even outside the narrow confines of the town of Makkah. Here I give one of the most interesting examples. The following is a verse by the very famous pre-Islamic Christian poet of al-Ḥīrah, 'Adī b. Zayd. The verse is in one of his odes which he composed in the prison into which he had been thrown by the King al-Nu'mān III.

سَعَى الأَعْدَاءُ لاَ يَأْلُونَ شَـرّاً عَلَيَّ، وَرَبِّ مَـكَّةَ وَالصَّلِيبِ

The poet complains to the king saying that the malignant slanderers did everything they could do in order to sow discord between him and the king.

"The enemies tried hard against me", he says, "without desisting from doing anything that could harm me, by the Lord of Makkah and

the Crucified".[6]

In this verse 'Adī b. Zayd claims his complete innocence and says that the misunderstanding on the part of the king has been produced only by the machination of the slanderers envious of his good fortune, and in order to give special weight to this declaration he swears by the Lord of Makkah and Christ putting together the two 'Lords' into a single oath.

What is important to remember regarding this verse is that the poet 'Adī b. Zayd was an Arab Christian, but he was neither a simple Arab nor an ordinary Christian. He was a man of the highest culture of his age. He was brought up and educated in a high Persian society at the time when the Sassanian culture was at its apogee under Kisrā Anūshirwān; he occupied a high official position, went to Constantinople in the capacity of a diplomat, so to speak, when the Emperor Tiberius II was at the head of Byzantium and came to know Christianity more deeply at this big center of Christianity. And as an Arab poet, he was justly regarded as the greatest of the whole tribe of Tamīm.

The fact that this man of highest culture and education put in one of his solemn oaths, the Lord of Makkah and Christ together is significant, in my view in two different ways: it is of importance, first of all, in connection with the problem of the relational meaning of the word *Allāh* in its purely Arabian aspect. That a highly educated Christian, not a pagan Arab, living in al-Ḥīrah, away from Makkah, did use this concept of the Lord of Ka'bah in this way shows better than anything else how widespread and influential was this particular connotation of Allah.

But it is also significant, and perhaps even more significant—albeit more delicate and subtle—in connection with the second case as distinguished above, that is, the problem of the purely Christian conception of Allah that was prevalent among the Arab Christians of that age.

The example of 'Adī b. Zayd's verse would seem to suggest, at least to my mind, that there was in the Christian psychology an unconscious tendency or inclination towards identifying their Christian concept of Allah with the purely pagan Arabian concept of Allah as the Lord of the Makkan shrine. I would not say a complete identification, but at least the first step towards it, *i.e.*, a non-incompatibility between the two. Otherwise the expression would

have been merely a most strange and bizzare combination of ideas.

And if this understanding of mine is right, then perhaps we might say with some confidence that this kind of attitude on the part of the Arab Christians must have played an extremely important role in the development of a lofty and spiritualized concept of God among the pagan Arabs themselves.

However this may be, we do not have to attach so much importance exclusively to this very particular problem of the partial identification of Allah the Lord of Ka'bah and Allah the Christian God. More generally, the very fact that the Christians—and the Jews, for that matter—used the same word *Allāh* in reference to their Biblical God this fact alone must have been very influential on the religious development of the conception of the pre-Islamic Arabs, particularly so in the case of those of the more enlightened type represented by poets like al-Nābighah, al-A'shā al-Akbar and Labīd, those Arabs, that is, who although pagan, had a good first-hand knowledge of the Christians and the Jews, their creed and their custom, a knowledge they owed to their close personal contact with them. This last point will be dealt with in more detail a few paragraphs later. In any case, the verse we have just examined will serve as an excellent introduction to our next topic which is presented by the case in which we see the word *Allāh* used by the Jews and Christians according to their own conception of God.

III. The Jews and the Christians

The main problem of this section need not be dealt with at length in view of the fact that the general cultural situation of the Jews and the Christians in *Jāhiliyyah* is a matter of commnon knowledge among the Orientalists. I shall restrict myself to some points of direct relevance to the topic of the present chapter.[7]

In those days, the Arabs lived surrounded closely by great Christian powers. Abyssinia, to begin with, was Christian; the Abysinians were Monophysites. The Byzantine empire, whose high civilization was greatly admired by the Arabs was of course Christian. The dynasty of Ghassān who served as a kind of outpost in Arabia for the Greek Emperors of Costantinopole was Christian, from the second king 'Amr I, famous for having built the monasteries

of Ḥālī, Ayyūb and Ḥannād, down to the close of the dynasty in A.D. 637, when the last king Jabalah II was dethroned by the Muslim conquerers. The Ghassānids, too, were Monophysites.

Al-Ḥīrah on the other hand, which was the Persian vassal-state and which exercised a great influence on the life and conception of even the desert Arabs, was, as is well-known, an important center in East Syrian, *i.e.*, Nestorian Church. And as a result of their direct contact with these big centers of Christianity, some of the big nomadic tribes were in the process of Christianization. Furthermore, as noted above, many of the Arab intellectuals of the age had a considerable knowledge of Christianity. The great poet al-Nābighah is an outstanding example. Another great poet of *Jāhiliyyah*, al-A'shā al-Akbar had an intimate personal contact with the Bishops of Najrān, and his knowledge of Christianity was far from being a superficial one, as his *Dīwān* shows clearly and conclusively.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the people of Makkah remained entirely uninfluenced by such a situation, if only for the reason that they, as professional merchants, travelled on business so often to these Christian centers. Besides, in Makkah itself, there were also Christians, not only Christian slaves, but Christians of the clan of Banū Asad b. 'Abd al-'Uzzā.

As to the Jews, quite a number of Jewish tribes had settled in Arabia. Yathrib, Khaybar, Fadak, Taymā' and Wadī al-Qurā being some of the most important centers settled by immigrant Jews or Jewish proselytes. And although in Makkah there seems to have been practically no Jew, the Makkans must have been familiar with some at least of the basic ideas and concepts of Judaism.

Both the Jews and the Christians in Arabia used Arabic as their vernacular, and, as I have pointed out earlier, referred to their Biblical God by the very word *Allāh*, which was something quite natural seeing that the 'basic' meaning conveyed by this word was a very abstract one that would correspond roughly to the Greek *ho theos*. This conceivably provided a good opportunity for the convergence of the two different concepts of God into a certain kind of unity, albeit a very vague one, in the *Jāhilī* minds.

In general, Judeo-Christian religious concepts were, so to speak, in the air at that time, ready to influence both sides, I mean, both the *Jāhilī* Arabs and the Jews and Christians in their understanding of the position of each other. This is clearly reflected in many important

traditions. I will take up here one of them as an interesting example. It is a famous tradition about Waraqah b. Nawfal connected with Muḥammad's first appearance on the stage of history as Prophet and Messenger of God. Al-Bukhārī records it in his chapter on "How Revelation began to visit the Prophet"[8] in his Ḥadīth collection. The story runs like this:

When the very first Revelation "Recite in the name of thy Lord who created"[9] came to the Prophet in a very strange and awe-inspiring form, the Prophet who had never experienced such a thing before, naturally got panic-stricken. He lost all self-confidence; he was uneasy, nervous, and distressed. In short he himself did not know how he should understand this strange experience.

His wife Khadījah not only reassured him, but sought stronger reassurance for him from an authority. This authority was her cousin, the very famous Waraqah b. Nawfal b. Asad. Here is the text of the main part of the story as it has been handed down to us by al-Bukhārī:

«فانطلقت به خديجةُ حتى أتت به ورقةَ بن نوفل بن أسد بن عبد العُزَّى ابن عمِّ خديجة، وكان تنصر في الجاهلية، وكان يكتب الكتاب العِبراني فيكتب من الإنجيل بالعبرانية ما شاء الله أن يكتب، وكان شيخاً كبيراً قد عميَ فقالت له خديجة: يا ابن عم اسمَعْ من ابن أخيك، فقال له ورقة: يا ابن أخي ماذا ترى؟ فأخبره رسول الله خبرَ ما رأى، فقال له ورقة: هذا الناموس الذي نَزَّل الله على موسى، ويا ليتني فيها جَذَعاً، ليتني أكون حيّاً إذ يخرجك قومك. فقال رسول الله: أو مُخرجيَّ هم؟ قال: نعم، لم يأت قط رجلٌ بمثل ما جئتَ به إلاّ عُودِيَ، وإن يُدركني يومُك أنصرْك نصراً مؤزرا».

Then she (*i.e.* Khadījah) took him to Waraqah b. Nawfal b. Asad b. 'Abd al-'Uzzā, her cousin. Now this man who, had been converted to Christianity in the days of paganism was thoroughly conversant with Hebrew[10] and had made a copy of a considerable portion of the Evangel in Hebrew. He was at that time a very old man and had already lost his eyesight. Khadījah said, "O my cousin, listen to the son of your brother".[11] Waraqah asked him, "Son of my brother, what have you seen?" Thereupon the Apostle of God told him about what he saw. Waraqah said, "This is precisely the *nāmūs* that was once sent down to Mūsā b. Imrān (*i e.* Moses). Would that I were young in (your days of prophethood)! Would that I might still be alive when your tribe will expel you!" The Apostle of God asked, "Will they really expel me?"

> "Yes", he replied, "No man ever brought what you have brought now without being treated as an enemy. If I could live until the day when you will be expelled,[12] I should support you with all my might!"

There is no positive reason for doubting the authenticity of this tradition; on the contrary, the very occurrence of the word *nāmūs*, which is evidently non-Qur'anic, instead of the common Qur'anic term *Tawrāt* (Torah) argues very strongly for its authenticity and genuineness. The word *nāmūs*, which is indeed the pivotal point of the story, is clearly the Greek word *nomos* for 'law' *i.e.* the exact equivalent of the Hebrew *Tôrâ*.

In any case, the story tells us that Waraqah who was well-known for his Christian religion and his good knowledge of Hebrew scripture, as soon as he heard from Muḥammad what had happened to him, identified this apparently strange experience of Muḥammad as something authentic belonging to the tradition of the Judeo-Christian monotheism. And this identification, to all appearance, gave confidence to Muḥammad's mind.

All the preceding consideration would seem to lead us towards the only reasonable—to my mind at least—conclusion that by the time Islam arose in Makkah, a considerably lofty conception of Allah had already been developed among the Arabs, or was developing gradually, as a converging point of two originally different concepts of God. On the one hand, the Arabian paganism, had been gradually developing the concept of Allah, as the Creator of the heaven and the earth, the Giver of rain which causes the earth to produce all the good things for the benefit of mankind, the Mighty God who watches over the sacredness of oaths, the Founder of some of the old religious customs,[13] and the Great Lord (*Rabb*) having the whole world in his hand.[14] For this much we have the undeniable testimony of the Qur'an itself. And there is no cogent reason to deny that all this was part of the autochthonous religion of Arabian paganism, although this was evidently only the highest and best part of this religion.

On the other hand, the monotheistic concept of God was spreading steadily among the Arabs, who, if they did not accept it as a matter of personal belief and faith, must have been at least well aware of the existence of some such concept of God among their neighbors and must have been quite familiar with it.

IV. The Judeo-Christian Concept of Allah in the Hands of the Pagan Arabs

In the last two sections we have examined, first, the purely pagan concept of Allah, and then, the Judeo-Christian concept of Allah. We have seen how these two were gradually tending to converge into one in the latter years of *Jāhiliyyah*. There was also something very important which served, as it were a bridge between the two shores. And with this we turn to the third case as distinguished above, namely, the case in which the Arabs, that is, the pagan Arabs who professed neither Christianity nor Judaism, had to talk about the latter, had to refer in their talk to things pertaining to these monotheistic religions. And, we might safely surmise seeing the general cultural situation of the time, such cases must have occurred not infrequently. Although we have no faithful contemporary records of what the Arabian people were saying among themselves on these matters, we find at least some interesting evidence in the work of the poets, particularly of those who used to compose in praise of their patrons, whether Christian kings of al-Ḥīrah or of Ghassān.

And this is even far more important still than those cases in which we see the Christians and the Jews using the word *Allāh* in reference to their God, because after all that is, in itself, something natural, too natural to give us any valuable clue to anything of real importance.

The case is quite different when, for example, al-Nābighah, a simple Bedouin poet, in addressing the Christian king of al-Ḥīrah, al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir, and singing in praise of the latter, uses the word *Allāh* in this way:

وَرَبَّ عَلَيْهِ اللهُ أَحْسَنَ صُنْعِهِ وَكَانَ لَهُ عَلَى البَرِيَّةِ نَاصِرُ

> Allah has completed upon him the best of his favors and let him gain victory and power over mankind.[15]

This Lakhmī prince al-Nu'mān, widely known as Abū Qābūs, whose reign fell roughly between 580 A.D. and 602 A.D., was a Christian who had been brought up in the Christian family of the very famous Zayd, the father of the poet 'Adī b. Zayd whom we have just met. So when the poet al-Nābighah uses the word *Allāh* in

saying that the king owes his wonderful prosperity, wealth and power to the great favor of *Allāh*, he must naturally mean the Christian God. At least this must be his intention.

We have a confirmatory evidence in another verse by the same poet. Al-Nābighah, having lost the royal favor of al-Nu'mān, went to Ghassān and was warmly welcomed and honored there by King 'Amr b. al-Ḥārith al-Asghar, and began composing panegerics on this new patron and his family, known today under the name of "Ghassān encomia" (*Ghassāniyyāt*). In one of the most famous *Ghassāniyyāt*, we find the following two verses that are far more interesting for our purpose than the one I have just quoted:[16]

لَهُمْ شِيمَةٌ لَمْ يُعْطِهَا اللهُ غَيْرَهُم مِنَ الْجُودِ وَالأَحْلاَمِ غَيْرِ عَوَازِبِ
مَجَلَّتُهُمْ ذَاتُ الإِلَهِ وَدِينُهُمْ قَوِيمٌ فَمَا يَرْجُونَ غَيْرَ الْعَوَاقِبِ

Here in praise of the Christian Ghassān he says, "They have a nature, like of which Allah has never given to any other man, that is, generosity accompanied by sound judgement that never deserts them. Their Scripture[17] is that of God (*al-Ilāh*, the original form of *Allāh*), and their faith is steadfast[18] and their hope is set solely on the world to come".[19]

This phenomenon is of particular relevance to our present topic in two important ways.

1. When the poet used the word *Allāh* in this way—and, we must remember, he did not do it only once, but very frequently—something must have occurred in his psychology. It may have been, in the beginning, simply a slight change of nuance or a slight shift of view-point; in any case, something of no small consequence to his religious outlook must have been growing in his mind. For it is difficult to imagine that this way of using the word *Allāh* did not exercise, unconsciously if not consciously, any influence on his image of God particularly when it repeated itself so often. And this, again, may very well have cast its reflection on his conception of Allah even when he was using the same word in reference to the non-Christian, purely Arabian God.

2. Equally important is the fact that in *Jāhiliyyah*, the social position of the poet was very high. The words uttered by a poet, especially a well-known great poet, were feared, venerated or loved

according to cases as a real spiritual force; and they had all the weight of a valuable social, or even sometimes national, asset. Poetry at that time was not a simple matter of personal expression of thoughts and emotions. It was a public phenomenon in the full sense of the word.

Impressive words uttered by a famous poet were propagated immediately within the tribe and beyond the tribe to the corners of the Arab world, "flying faster than an arrow" as they said. The poets were literally leaders of the public opinion.

So the fact that a great poet like al-Nābighah used the word *Allāh* in the the Christian acceptation, putting himself, at least at that very moment, in a Christian position by empathy, should not be taken as a mere matter of personal liking or inclination. On the contrary, it must have influenced in an indirect unconscious way the religious outlook of his pagan contemporaries. It must have taught them how to understand the word *Allāh* in its Biblical acceptation; more important still, it must have, further, induced them gradually to identify almost unconsciously their own pagan concept of God with that of the Christians.

V. Allah of the Ḥanīfs

Let us now turn to the fourth and the last variety according to our classification, *i.e.*, the conception of Allah peculiar to a group of people known as Ḥanīfs,[20] the pre-Islamic monotheists. The word *ḥanīf* is an extremely problematic one. Its etymology still remains obscure, and consequently its 'basic' meaning is very hard to define in a final way.[21] But the problem in itself, however interesting, is of comparatively small relevance to us as far as concerns our present topic. What concerns us at this stage is the singularly monotheistic—we might almost say, Qur'anic—conception of Allah entertained by the of this category. Let it suffice to remark that in the Qur'an the word *ḥanīf*—which is used many times, particularly in the Madīnan Sūrahs—means 'monotheist' in sharp contradistinction to the 'polytheists' or 'idol-worshippers'[22] (*mushrikūn*). The word is associated with the name of Abraham "who was a *Ḥanīf*, and neither a Jew nor a Christian, one who did not belong to the idol-worshippers".[23] In an important passage,[24] it is declared that this pure

monotheistic belief symbolized by the name of Abraham is "the true religion", "the natural predisposition (*fitrah*) to which God predisposed (*fatara*) mankind".

Among all those pre-Islamic Arabs who are known as Ḥanīfs Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt presents an unusually important case, because he was a very famous poet of the tribe of Thaqīf in Ṭā'if, and a considerable number of poems have been handed down to us under his name. Besides, Islamic Tradition (Ḥadīth) has also shown a lively concern for this man, because of his very particular relation with the Prophet Muḥammad, so that his life is known tolerable, well at least better than any other Ḥanīfs. He is, in this sense, not a dark mystery, like other Ḥanīfs; he is in this sense, not a dark mystery like other Ḥanīfs; he stands to a certain degree in the daylight of history.

As regards the poems that have been handed down to us, there is of course the big problem of genuineness. The problem is particularly delicate in his case because his words and ideas bear so close a resemblance to the Qur'anic ones. Many of the poems attributed to him must be spurious.[25] But even supposing that half of them are non-genuine, there is no reason to doubt the genuineness of them as a whole, unless we take the absurd view that all the Muslims who made reference to this poet from the Prophet Muḥammad himself down to the scholars of the Abbasid age were having a nightmare and talking in delirium strange things about him that did not correspond to any historical reality.

Besides, even the forged part must contain a modicum of truth in it, for in cases like this, one cannot forge without having before one's eyes a real model for copying, that is, some reality on which to base one's forgery. So even the forged poems must reflect in a peculiar way the original thought and ideas of this poet.

This man Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt is indeed an extraordinary figure in the whole *Jāhilī* literature. He was one of the leading personalities of the tribe of Thaqīf, and according to Abū 'Ubaydah, the greatest poet of the tribe. In *Jāhiliyyah* he was said to be in search of the true monotheistic religion, away from all idol-worship, but he remained an isolated dissenter without being converted to Judaism nor to Christianity. And yet the spiritual atmosphere in which he lived was almost completely Christian and Jewish, particularly the latter; and the Christian and Jewish elements he assimilated were mainly of Yemenite origin.

He is reported to have studied Hebrew and Syriac seriously and read those parts of the Holy Scripture that were available to him at that time in these languages; this is partly corroborated by the existence of a great number of Hebrew and Syriac words in his verses, which struck the philologists of the Abbasid period as extremely strange, so much so that, as Ibn Qutaybah says, of all the *Jāhilī* poets he was considered to be the only one whose poems could not be used as *hujjah* (evidence) in interpreting the Qur'an "because of this defect" *i.e.* "because of the abundance of strange words" (*kalimāt gharībah*) he used.

According to tradition he wore always sack-cloth or coarse hair-cloth (*masūḥ*) as a mark of a man wholly devoted to worship—he was predecessor of the later Sufis in this respect—declared wine to be unlawful (*ḥarām*), called the religion he was in search of *dīn al-ḥunafā'* ("the religion of Hanīfs") and associated it with Abraham (Ibrāhīm) and Ishmael (Ismā'īl).

So far so good. But here begins that aspect of his which induced the Muslims to call him an "enemy of God" (*'adūww Allāh*). He is said to have been firmly convinced that a 'prophet' (*nabiy*) would be raised among the Arabs, and that he himself would be that person. According to one tradition he held the view that after Jesus Christ there would be six appearances of 'prophethood' (*nubuwwah*); already five occasions had passed and there remained only one and the last chance, and he was expecting the choice to fall upon him.

Whether this is true or not, when Muḥammad appeared as the Prophet of the Arabs, Umayyah got furiously angry or dissapointed, or perhaps both, and began his campaign against Islam. He instigated greatly the Quraysh of Makkah to oppose him, and some poems have been handed down to us which he composed bewailing the pagans killed in the battle of Uḥud. Among them there were two of his own maternal cousins, 'Utbah and Shaybah, and he urged his tribesmen to take revenge upon Muḥammad for their blood. And afterwards, he flew to Yemen, his spiritual home.

He did not change to the last this inimical attitude towards the Prophet of Islam, and on his death-bed he is related to have said: "This illness will inevitably cause my death. I know that the religion of *ḥanīf* is true, but I cannot help entertaining a doubt as regards Muḥammad".[26]

As regards his poems themselves we should say that they dis-

close a very, strange and even grotesque vision of the universe. Of course when we look at it from the Islamic point of view, there is nothing strange and bizarre in his poetic vision, but when we look at it against the background of the normal mentality of the *Jāhilī* Arab, we understand why even in his lifetime he was already beginning to be enshrouded in a cloud of myths and legends. His world is a dark forest of Jewish imagery; a unique world of Jewish fantasmagoria.

This world is also theocentric. There is One and only one personal God at the center of this world and He presides over everything existent. Around the image of this God, whom of course he calls Allah, there appear before our eyes apocalyptic pictures of His abode and His kingdom. He is sitting on his Throne[27] "alone and unique"[28] enveloped in a dazzling veil of light.[29]

No human sight can penetrate through this veil of light and go up to the Divine Presence. The veil of light is surrounded by the heavenly host of angels whom he sometimes calls "strengthened creatures",[30] *i.e.*, creatures made strong and powerful by Divine assistance; they are "arranged in lines", some of them carrying the Throne, some of them silently listening to Divine Revelation;[31] among them Jibrīl, *i.e.* Gabriel and Mīkāl, *i.e.*, Michael and some others occupy the highest places.

Then the Biblical stories of creation are told. The present life which we on earth are living is called *dunyā* and its essential ephemerality is emphasized: nothing remains for ever; every living being must sooner or later become worn out and perish[32] except the only One who remains eternally, the Holy One, possessor of Majesty.[33]

Then comes an exhortation to the true monotheistic religion which he calls "Ḥanīfitic religion" (*dīn al-ḥanīfiyyah*); the only right way for man to take in this transient world is to stop following his blind desire (*hawā*)[34] and to follow the Divine guidance (*hudā*).[35] But, he says, the human mind is so made that it is naturally inclined towards "turning away from the truth"[36] like "a blind man who goes deviating from the right path".[37]

The ultimate end of all this is the Last Judgment. And here we have an abundance of eschatological concepts stemming from the Bible. Hell and paradise are minutely described. All the sinners are brought up naked to the place of judgment and are thrown into the "ocean of fire",[38] bound with long chains and crying "Woe is me!

Woe is me!", while those who have god-fearing[39] (*muttaqūna*) are richly rewarded with the abode of blissful life,[40] under the cool shadow of trees.

This is, in broad and simple outlines, the picture of the world which Umayyah b. Abī al-Salt presents to our imagination. Even supposing, as I said above, that half of this picture were a forgery yet the animating spirit of the original *weltanschauung* and its constituents are not at all difficult to grasp through it.

As to the Hanīfitic conception of Allah, we may observe that according to this poet, He is the "God of the whole world",[41] the "Creator"[42] of everything and all creatures are "His servants".

هُو اللهُ بَارِئُ الْخلقِ والْخَلْقُ كلُّهم إماءٌ لهُ طَوْعاً جَميعاً وَأعْبُدُ

He is Allah, the Creator of everything, and all the created things serve Him willingly as faithful servants.[43]

That is to say, He is the Lord (*rabb*) of His servants.

He is the Great King of the heavens and the earth,[44] who reigns over his subjects with absolute sovereignty. This majestic aspect of Allah is referred to by one of the 'strange words'—*al-kalimāt al-gharībah*, as Ibn Qutaybah called them—that have greatly vexed the commentators and lexicologists of the Abbasid period. The word in question is *salītat*, originally a Syriac word, which occurs in the oft-quoted verse:

إن الأنَامَ رَعَايا اللهِ كُلُّهـمُ هو السلِيطَطُ فوقَ الأرْضِ مستطِرُ

All men are Allah's subjects; He is the Absolute Sovereign, on earth Omnipotent.[45]

And, most important of all, He is Unique, absolutely One.

ومنْ لمْ تُنازعْهُ الْخلائقُ مُلْكَهُ وإنْ لمْ تفرِّدْهُ العِبادُ فمُفْرَدُ

One with whom no one of the creatures ever disputes the kingdom, He is the One who stands alone without peers, even if His servants (*i.e.* men) do not make Him one, (that is, worship besides him other god and idols).

Such is his conception of Allah. As far as these points are concerned, we see that the Ḥanīfitic conception of God has absolutely nothing contradictory and incompatible with the Islamic one.

In any case, the very existence in *Jāhiliyyah* of a man like Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt would seem to be a striking indication that religious ideas resembling those of Islam were existent among the pre-Islamic Arabs, and that concepts characteristic of a spiritual religion were not at all unknown and alien to their minds, at least in the period just preceding the rise of Islam. This makes it also understandable why the Qur'an attached the new Islamic movement to the Ḥanīfitic tradition. This is the positive side of the matter.

But it has also a negative side. While the positive side concerns the similarity between the Ḥanīfs and the Qur'an, the negative side relates to the esssential difference between the two. Referring to "the immense difference" between the Qur'an and the production of Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt, Sir Hamilton Gibb remarks:[46] "This is the vibrant moral tone that permeates it.[47] While the poems may echo the same moral lesson, there is nothing of the urgency and passion of the Qur'anic presentation. However vivid and sensuous Umayyah's descriptions (of Paradise and Hell, for example) may have been, they do not seem to have had any marked effect upon his fellow-citizens of Ṭā'if, let alone the Makkans. Similar materials presumably circulated among other monotheistic circles and in other parts of Arabia, of course take their place within the total content of the Qur'an. But what gave them their effect in their Qur'anic presentation was that they were linked up with the essential moral core of its teaching".

We should remark, too, that the so-called *ḥanīfiyyah* was not a strongly organized spiritual group movement. These people stood each one of them alone and isolated in the pagan society. Their aim was strictly restricted to personal salvation, and not the salvation of other people, much less of mankind at large. In short, they were only isolated, exceptional figures. And in this sense, the religious *weltanschauung* of Umayyah of which we have just had a glimpse was presumably much less influential in determining the general atmosphere of pagan Arabia than the vague and more general influence exercised directly by the Christians and the Jews. In any case his world-view did not represent the dominant note of the *Jāhilī* spirituality. On the contrary, there is evidence to show that it was

regarded by the pagan masses as something quite fantastic and bizarre. This we can see from the way the Makkan people reacted in general to the monotheism and eschatology of Islam as presented by the Qur'an.

However it seems to be also certain that the activity of a man like Umayyah contributed considerably towards making the apocalyptic and eschatological ideas somewhat known to the pagan Arabs, who, although finding them quite repelling and absurd, must have at least come to know that there were around them a few queer people who entertained such strange ideas.

Keeping in mind the main points we have just examined, let us go back to the problem that was raised in the first part of this chapter concerning the way in which the Qur'an presented the Islamic concept of Allah to the pagan auditors. I think we are now in a somewhat better position to understand why the Qur'an, whenever it mentions the name of Allah, does not show any sign of hesitation or apprehension, any sign, that is, of offering something quite alien and unknown to the hearers. On the contrary it urges the pagan Arab to be more strictly consistent in their belief in Allah, and blames them for being logically so inconsistent. In addition to the examples already adduced we may quote, for instance:

﴿قُل لِّمَنِ الأَرْضُ وَمَن فِيهَا إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ. سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ، قُلْ أَفَلاَ تَذَكَّرُونَ﴾

Say: "Whose is the earth and whoever is in it, if you have the capacity to understand rightly?" They will say: "Allah's". Say: "Will you not then remember?" (i.e. will you still refuse to come to your senses and awake to the Truth which is already there in your hearts in a latent form?)

Al-Mu'minūn, 23:86-87 [84-85]

This expression "Will you not then remember?" (*a-fa-lā tadhakkarūna*) like a similar one which is also very often used "Will you not exercise your intellect" (*a-fa-lā ta'qilūna*), implies, in contexts of this kind, blaming and reproaching the pagans for being unable to draw, or perhaps even being unwilling to draw, the final and most important conclusion about Allah despite the fact that they have already such a right understanding of His nature.

The next passage is even more explicit on this point.

﴿قُلْ مَن بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ يُجِيرُ وَلاَ يُجَارُ عَلَيْهِ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ. سَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّهِ. قُلْ فَأَنَّى تُسْحَرُونَ﴾

Say: "In whose hand is the supreme dominion over all things and He protects while against Him no one can protect anybody, if you know?" They will say: "Allah's". Say: "How then are you bewitched?"

Al-Mu'minūn, 23:90-91 [88-89]

We should notice this last forcible expression "How then are you bewitched?". It expresses suprise at the sight of the people who know and acknowledge that Allah has in His hand the supreme dominion over the whole world of being, and yet do not worship Him as He should be. Their attitude is not understandable unless you suppose them all to be bewitched.

Such an argument would lose its point completely if we do not suppose that the Qur'an assumes from the outset in those to whom Muhammad is to convey the Divine message at least some vague conception of Allah, which, although quite erroneous in many essential points from the standpoint of Islam, contains also a number of good and right elements that are quite acceptable. It is remarkable that the Qur'an, far from combating the latter, tries to make these elements more precise and impressive by force of logic.

Notes

1. See Chapter 7.
2. فَأَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ (29:62) بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لاَ يَعْقِلُون (29:63)
3. Of course this statement does not apply to a verse like the following, where the expression "making one's religion sincere" should be taken in its literal sense.

﴿وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلاَّ لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ﴾

And they were commanded naught else than to serve God, making the religion pure for Him, as men of pure monotheism (*Al-Bayyinah*, 98:4 [5])

4. Also *Al-Nahl*, 16:40 [38]
5. *Al-Quraysh*, 106:1-3:
﴿فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ﴾
6. Many people would feel inclined to translate the last word in the verse *salīb* as 'Cross', not 'Crucified' as I have done. I prefer my interpretation because it makes the expression livelier and more colorful in that it places two different 'Lords'—Christ and Allah—side by side. If we adopt the alternative interpretation, the reference to Christ becomes slightly less direct and the expression seems to lose thereby the nakedness, so to speak, and becomes less forcible. In either case, however, the general meaning remains exactly the same.
7. For a more detailed survey of the whole problem, see, for instance Carlo Nallino, "Ebrei e Chistiani nell' Arabia Preislamica" (*Raccolta di Scritti*, vol. III), to which I myself am deeply indebted.
8. *Hadīth* No. 3: «كيف كان بدء الوحي إلى رسول الله».
9. ﴿اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ﴾ (العلق: 1).
10. Literally: he could write the Hebrew writing.
11. In addressing her old cousin, she made Muhammad "cousin of Waraqah" in order to show respect to the latter.
12. Literally: if your day reaches me.
13. 4:139 ff.
14. *Al-Mu'minūn*, 23:88-91 [86-89].
15. *Dīwān al-Nābighah*, Beirut, 1953, p. 88, v. 4
16. *Dīwān* p. 16, vv. 2-3.
17. *majallatu-hum*; var. *mahallatu-hum*, "their home is God's own land".
18. Or, "their religion (*dīn*) is right".
19. Or, reading *khayra* instead of *ghayra*, "what they wish for is the best of the ultimate end, *i.e.* Hereafter."
20. Arabic *hanīf*, pl. *hunafā'*.
21. See Charles Lyall, "The Words Hanīf and Muslim", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1903, pp. 771 ff.
22. For instance, 3:60 [67]; 3:89 [95]; 22:32 [31], *etc.*, *etc.*
23. 30: 29 [30]
24. 2:129 [135]; 3:60 [67]
25. Friedrich Schulthess, "Umajja b. Abi-ṣ-Ṣalt", *Orientalische Studien, Theodor Nöldeke*, Giessen, 1906, vol. I, pp. 71-89. The same scholar published later a critical edition of the poems attributed to this poet, 1911, Leipzig, from which I draw material for the following description of his ideas.
26. «هذه المرضة مسيتي، وأنا أعلمُ أن الحنيفية حق، ولكن الشك يداخلني في بعض».

27. مليكٌ على عرش السماء "the great king sitting on the Throne of Heaven"
28. فردٌ مُوَحَّد
29. حجاب النور
30. خلق مُؤَيَّد
31. الوحي
32. يفْنى ويبلى
33. سوى الباقي الْمُقَدَّس ذي الجلال
34. هوى
35. الهدى
36. التَّصدُّد عن الحق
37. كَالأَعْمَى الْمُمِيطُ عن الْهُدَى
38. بحر النار
39. "المتقون" from *taqwā*, see Chapter 9, section II.
40. "دار عيشٍ ناعم"
41. "إِلَهُ العالمين"
42. "الخالق"
43. "رَبُّ العباد" This corresponds to the Lord-servant relation between God and man, that we are going to discuss in Chapter 8.
44. "مَلِيكُ السموات وأرضها"
45. Since those who handed down this verse and commented on the word were not sure even of this form, let alone its meaning, several variants have come into being: *al-silīṭat* السِّنْطا *al-siltīṭ* السِّلْطيط . In Ibn Qutaybah's *al-Shi'r wal Shu'arā'* gives *al-saltālit* السَّلْطَليط
46. Sir Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia", *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. LV, Number 4, 1962, p. 280.
47. *i.e.* the Qur'an.

CHAPTER 5

Ontological Relation Between God and Man

I. The Concept of Creation

In a religious or philosophical *weltanschauung*, the being and existence of man forms as a general rule the major problem. The eternal and ever recurring question: Where does man come from? What is the source of his very being here in the world? This is one of those basic problems that have always disquieted the human mind. In the Qur'anic conception, the right answer—and the only right one—to this question is not far to seek: the source of being is God Himself; existence is conferred upon man by God as a gratuitous gift. In other words, there is, between God and man, a fundamental relation of creator and creature in this part of the Qur'anic *divina commedia*, Allah plays the role of the Giver of being and existence to man. He is the Creator of man, and man is nothing but his creature. Indeed, Allah is the Creator of the whole world, ranging from the angels above (40:18 [19]), Jinn (55:14 [15]), the heavens and the earth (14:22 [19], *etc.*), the sun and the moon, the day and the night (41:37, *etc*), to the mountains and the rivers (13:3, *etc.*), trees, fruits, grain and herbs (55:10-11 [11-12], *etc.*), and all kinds of animals, "some of them going upon their bellies, some of them going upon two feet, some, again, going upon four" (24:44 [45]). There will be no end if we go on enumerating what He has created. He is, in short, the "Creator of everything".[1] And man is only one of these created things, albeit the most important one. In fact, the Qur'an may be regarded in a certain sense as a grand hymn in honor of Divine

Creation. At any rate, the whole Qur'an is literally pregnated with the thought of Creation and a feeling of profound admiration for it.

In the preceding chapter, we have seen that the concept itself of Divine Creation was not at all unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs, and also that this concept seems to have been usually associated with the name of Allah. This association between 'creation' (*khalq*) and 'Allah', however, was not always necessarily firm and definite. For the Qur'an tells us that there were some idol-worshippers who attributed this power of creation to the idols.

﴿أَمْ جَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ شُرَكَاءَ خَلَقُوا كَخَلْقِهِ فَتَشَابَهَ الْخَلْقُ عَلَيْهِمْ، قُلِ اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ﴾

Or do they assign to Allah associates who have [allegedly] created just as He has created, so that the creative activity of both seems alike to them? Say: "Allah is the Creator of everything, and He is the One, the Almighty".

Al-Ra'd, 13:17 [16]

But this was presumably only an exceptional case. In more normal cases, creative activity was to all appearance ascribed to the highest God, Allah. And often, in *Jāhiliyyah* literature, we are surprised to meet with the concept of Divine Creation which is exceedingly close to the Qur'anic one—unless, of course, we explain away all such cases as forgeries and interpolations. In the following verse, for instance, the concept of creation is associated with that of 'Lord' (*rabb*). The poet is 'Antarah.[2]

فَيَا طَيْرَ الأَرَاكِ بِحَقِّ رَبٍّ بَرَاكَ عَسَاكَ تَعْلَمُ أَيْنَ حَلُّوا

O bird, perching on the *arāk*-tree, by a Lord who has created you, you must surely know where they (*i.e.* my beloved ones) dwell now.

It is significant that the expression of "a Lord who created a bird" is here in an oath-formula.[3] Still more Qur'anic is the thought expressed by the poet in the following verse.[4]

حَرِصَتْ عَلَى طُولِ الْبَقَاءِ وَإِنَّمَا مُبْدِي النُّفُوسِ أَبَادَهَا لِيُعِيدَهَا

Speaking about a girl who has just died, 'Antarah says, "She was clinging to (the hope of) a long life. However, the One who created all living beings has taken her life away to make her return (to her original state)".

There seems to have been even the conception of Allah's having raised up the sky and established the moon there. In the next example, the famous *Jāhilī* warrior-poet, Bā'ith b. Ṣuraym al-Yashkūrī refers to this idea, again in a solemn oath-formula. He swears "by the One who has raised up the sky and the moon" that he will surely take vengeance on his enemy.[5]

إِنِّي وَمَنْ سَمَكَ السَّمَاءَ مَكَانَهَا وَالْبَدرَ لَيْلَةَ نِصْفِهَا وَهِلَالِهَا

I solemnly swear by the One who has raised up the sky to its place and the moon also, both when it is full in the middle of the month and on the night when it is a crescent.

Since the testimony given by the Qur'an itself and that afforded by pre-Islamic literature agree with each other as to the existence of the concept of creation among the *Jāhilī* Arabs, we may be quite sure about this matter. The problem that must be solved is rather: To what extent was this concept of Divine Creation influential in determining the nature of the *weltanschauung* of the pre-Islamic Arabs. And when it comes to this point, we must admit that the concept was, on the whole, an extremely weak one having little influence on the actual life of the *Jāhilī* Arabs; it does not seem to have affected in any essential way the conception of human life and existence. In other words, a *Jāhilī* man could very well live on quite comfortably without having to pay any attention at all to the origin of his own existence. The significance of this point will be brought home if we remember, by way of contrast, the fact that the Qur'an urges the Muslims to be constantly conscious of their essential creatureliness. A Muslim who lost this sense of creatureliness would by that very fact cease to be a *muslim* in the real sense of the word, for, then, he would have fallen into the grave sin of 'presumptuousness'—an important concept which the Qur'an signifies by words like *ṭughyān* and *istighnā'*, the former meaning roughly "to exceed the (human) bounds by insolence" and the latter "to feel one's self completely free and independent (*i.e.* owing nothing to anybody, not even to God)".

Thus the consciousness of creatureliness is linked directly with the problem of the Lord-servant relation between God and man which we are to discuss in a later chapter.

So the mere occurrence of words like *khalq* (creation), *khāliq* (creator), *bārī* (originator) *etc.* in pre-Islamic literature should not mislead us into thinking that the concept of Divine Creation was playing a decisive role in the *Jāhilī weltanschauung*. These and several other similar words meaning 'creation' that gathered around the name of Allah constituted only a vaguely defined and loosely delimited semantic field, which itself belonged in a larger field that consisted of words having reference to the supernatural order of being. But, we must recall, this semantic field of supernatural beings occupied in the whole of the pre-Islamic conceptual system only a narrow and peripheral place. Unlike the Qur'anic system in which Allah the Creator governs the entire *weltanschauung*, *Jāhiliyyah* did not attach great importance to this semantic field, which, therefore, did not play any decisive role in the *Jāhilī weltanschauung*. This is tantamount to saying that the idea of Allah's being the very 'source' of human existence, if it *was* there, meant very little to the minds of the pre-Islamic Arabs. And this is why the Qur'an tries so hard to bring home to them the very significance of this idea and to awaken them to the grave implication of it.

II. Human Destiny

There seems to be another important reason why the concept of Divine Creation was such a powerless one in the days of paganism despite the fact that concept itself did exist, as we have seen, among the *Jāhilī* Arabs. It was a weak concept because the Arabs in pre-Islamic times were not very much concerned about the problem of the origin of their being. Their attention, instead of being called to the 'beginning' of life, was predominantly directed toward the 'end' of life, that is, Death. In fact, every reader of pre-Islamic literature will become aware sooner or later that Death was the only subject that was liable to arouse in the *Jāhilī* mind something like philosophical meditation. The *Jāhilī* Arabs who, as we saw earlier, were by nature a people least inclined to philosophical thinking, could become philosophers only when they were made seriously

conscious of the inevitability of death. Hence the favorite subject of pre-Islamic poets: the problem of *khulūd* (the eternal life), the absolute unattainableness of which they were so painfully aware of, and which drove them to their characteristic philosophy of life, the pessimistic nihilism.[6]

In any case, whenever a *Jāhilī* man was not entirely absorbed in worldly-affairs, bravery, spoiling and plundering, whenever he found time to come back to himself and reflect on his life, the first problem that came to his mind seems to have been that of Death and of the 'powers' or 'causes' that would bring it to him. This was the problem of human destiny for the pre-Islamic Arabs. It should be noticed that in this conception there is not involved the notion of the Hereafter, while in ordinary cases 'human destiny' concerns mainly the problem of life after death. In the case of the *Jāhilī* Arabs, even with regard to this problem attention is almost exclusively centered on the span of life on earth in the very present world, with major emphasis placed on the end of the line; what will come beyond that final point, whatever, it may be, is of no concern to the *Jāhilī* mind. Besides, as we have seen, for most of the pre-Islamic Arabs there could be absolutely nothing after the end of the present life. The body, once buried in the earth, decays and becomes dust while the soul flies away like the passing wind.

هَلْ نَحْنُ غِلاَّ كَأَجْسَادٍ نَمُرُّ بِهَا تَحْتَ التُّرَابِ وَأَرْوَاحٍ كَأَرْوَاحِ

What are we (if we were not a sort of combination of a body with a soul?) The body, we go down[7] with it (at our death) under the earth, while the soul (passes away) just like a gust of wind.

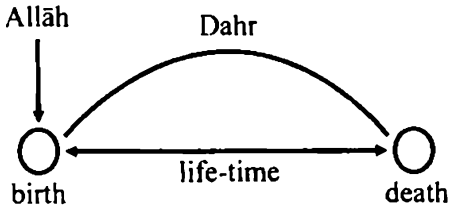
Of all the stages of the life-time of a man, the last stage, *i.e.*, Death, was, as I have just said, the most important one in the *Jāhilī* conception of human existence. The first stage, that is, the origin and beginning of his existence, was not very much cared about. But when it *was*, it was normally linked up with the concept of creation. We remarked in the last chapter that the concept of Allah-Creator was known to the pre-Islamic Arabs. In the *Jāhilī* system, too, man was considered to owe his being and existence to the creative activity of Allah. But there is here an extremely interesting point to note. Man, once created by Allah, severes his ties, so to speak, with his Creator,

and his existence on earth is, from that time on, put into the hands of another, far more powerful, Master. And the tyrannical sway of this Master continues till the very moment of his death, which is nothing but the culmination of the tyranny and oppression under which he has been groaning through all his life. The name of this tyrannical Sovereign is *Dahr* (Time). In Chapter 3 we have quoted in connection with a different problem a verse from the Qur'an, in which this word with precisely this meaning, is put in the mouth of the *Kāfirs*.

﴿وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلاَّ حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلاَّ الدَّهْرُ﴾

They say: there is nothing but this present life of ours; we die and we live, and it is only 'Time' (Dahr) that destroys us.

Al-Jāthiyah, 45:23 [24]



Dahr has various other names: *Zamān* (Time), *'Aṣr* (Age), *Ayyām* (Days), *'Awd* (Time), but the underlying idea is always exactly the same. Here I give only a few examples.

'Awd:[8] وَلَوْلاَ نَبْلُ عَوْضٍ فِي خُطَّبَايَ وَأَوْصَالِي

Zamān:[9] فَغَيَّرْنَ آيَاتِ الدِّيَارِ مَعَ الْبِلَى وَلَيْسَ عَلَى رَيْبِ الزَّمَانِ كَفِيلُ

Zamān:[10] هَلْ عِيشَةٌ طَابَتْ لَنَا إِلاَّ وَقَدْ أَبْلَى الزَّمَانُ قَدِيمَهَا وَجَدِيدَهَا

'Aṣr:[11] فَإِنْ تَشِبِ الْقُرُونُ فَذَاكَ عَصْرٌ وَعَاقِبَةُ الأَصَاغِرِ أَنْ يَشِيبُوا

As regards *Dahr* itself, it is quite easy for us to isolate its basic image underlying this concept from any verse in which the word occurs. The following verse by Ta'abbata Sharran, for example, gives us the image of a merciless, cold-blooded tyrant against whom not even the bravest hero can fight:

تَـــزَّنِي الدَّهْرُ وَكَانَ غَشُوماً بِأَبِـــيٍّ جَـــارُهُ مَا يُـــذَلُّ

Dahr has plundered me, the *Dahr* who is a merciless tyrant, of (a dear friend of mine) a haughty one who has never allowed his client to be disgraced, (*i.e.* let alone himself).[12]

Very frequently *Dahr* is described as a wild ferocious animal that bites you with sharp teeth.

فَإِنَّ الدَّهْرَ أَعْصَلُ ذُو شَغَبِ

. . . for *Dahr* has hooked teeth (that never quit), ever ready to injure us.[13]

إِذَا الـدَّهْرُ عَضَّتْكَ أَنْيَابُهُ لَـدَى الشَّرِّ فَأَزِمْ بِهِ مَا أَزَمْ

When *Dahr* bites you with his dog-teeth in misfortune, bite him back with all your might as much as he bites you.[14]

Thus the pre-Islamic view of human life has at its very center 'Something' dark and mysterious that extends its tyrannical sway over the life process of every individual man from the cradle to the grave. And this 'Something' which roughly corresponds to what we usually call 'Fate', is almost exclusively conceived of as a half-personal destructive force that not only brings all things to decay but also causes incessantly all kinds of suffering, misery and misfortune to human existence all through the span of life. This latter aspect of manifestation of its destructive activity has a number of particular names, like *ṣurūf* ("*ṣurūf* of *Dahr*"), *ḥadathān* (*ḥadathān* of *Dahr*), or *ḥawādith*, *rayb* ("*rayb* of *Dahr*" or "*rayb* of *Zamān*"), *etc.*, all meaning approximately "unpredictable turns (of Fortune)"; it is sometimes called metaphorically *banat al-dahr* (Daughters of *Dahr*).

أَبَعْدَ الْحَارِثِ الْمَلِكِ بنِ عَمْرٍو وَبَعْدَ الْخَيْرِ حُجْرٍ ذِي الْقِبَابِ
أُرَجِّي مِنْ صُرُوفِ الدَّهْرِ لِيناً وَلَمْ تَعْفُلْ عَنِ الصُّمِّ الصِّلَابِ

After having seen the death of (my grandfather) the king al-Ḥārith, and (my father) Ḥujr the Peerless, who possessed so many mansions, how

could I hope for tenderness from the *ṣurūf* (turns) of *Dahr*, which, I know, never leave untouched even the lofty mountains of massy rocks?[15]

رَمَتْنِي بَنَاتُ الدَّهْرِ مِنْ حَيْثُ لاَ أَرَى
فَكَيْفَ لِمَنْ يُرْمَى وَلَيْسَ بِرَامِ

The Daughters of *Dahr* have shot at me from a place I cannot see. What can a man do when he is shot at without being able to shoot back?[16]

And no one, not even the most valient warrior, the wisest sage, can escape from the blind and capricious tyranny of *Dahr*. At the root of the deep irremediable pessimism of *Jāhiliyyah* lies such a dark conception of human destiny.

The destructive power of *Dahr* becomes particularly manifest at the end of a man's existence. It is interesting that *Dahr* then changes its name and assumes various new names, the commonest among them being *maniyyah* (pl. *manāyā*), *manūn*, *ḥimām*, *ḥummah*.[17] In the following verse from the *Dīwān* of the Hudhayl tribe, two of the words here mentioned are used side by side, showing that they were practically synonymous with each other.

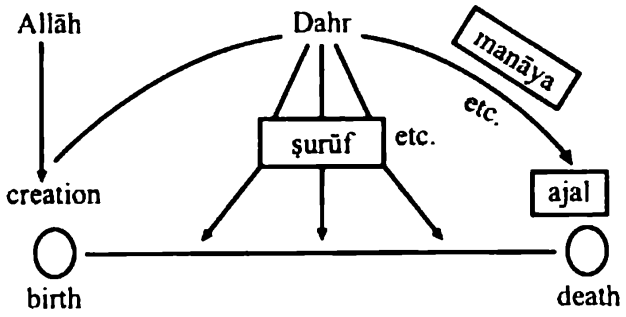
لَعَمْرُكَ وَالْمَنَايَا غَالِبَاتٌ وَمَا تُغْنِي التَّمِيمَاتُ الْحِمَامَا

Yes, indeed, *Manāyā* always gains the ultimate victory, and even talismans are of no use against the destructive power of *Ḥimām*.[18]

These words all mean 'death'. But they do not simply mean 'death', but 'death' as the last and most destructive manifestation of the power of *Dahr*. So, although in contexts of this kind we find the word *mawt* (death) often used in such a way that it might be replaced freely by one of these words, there is semantically a wide difference between the two cases. *Mawt* (death) as a natural—biological, we might say—phenomenon, while the group words that we are dealing with here belong to the semantic field of human destiny represented by the focus-word *dahr*. They refer, in other words, to the phase of the *Dahr's* rule over a man's life-time; they represent the particular forms which *Dahr* assumes when it approaches the ultimate goal. It

is, quite natural that this goal itself should also be often designated by the same words.[19]

As regards this concept of the final point or goal of the *Dahr*'s rule, there is other important thing to be noticed. As we have remarked this final point corresponds, from the biological point of view, to 'death', just as 'creation' corresponds to 'birth'. But this is not yet the end of the whole story. The final point of the *Dahr*'s death rule is capable of being viewed from a somewhat different angle, that of determinism. And it was in reality a very common view among the pre-Islamic Arabs.



The conception is that the final point of a man's span of life is in each individual case definitely and immutably fixed and determined beforehand. Everybody, in other words, has an appointed day on which he has to meet his death. 'Death' from this point of view is called *ajal* (pl. *ajal*), 'the doom' or 'the appointed time'.

When that day arrives, anything, however small and weak, can kill anybody, however strong and powerful he may be. Al-Salakah, mother of the famous pre-Islamic outlaw al-Salīk, says bewailing the death of her son and consoling herself at the same time:[20]

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ قَاتِلٌ حِينَ تَلْقَى أَجَلَك

Anything indeed can kill you when you meet your own *ajal*.

It is, as al-Nābighah says in one of his poems on *Dahr*,[21] something 'written (*maktub*, from *kataba*, to write)'. And nobody can put it back by a single day.

فَإِنْ فَازَ سَهْمٌ لِلْمَنِيَّةِ لَمْ أَكُنْ جَزُوعاً وَهَلْ عَنْ ذَاكَ مِنْ مُتَأَخَّر

When I get the arrow of Death [the allusion is to the game of chance, a kind of lottery by arrows], I shall never lose my composure, for (of

what avail will it be?) Is there anybody at all who can remain alive beyond (the appointed time)?[22]

Whatever you may do, you cannot add even a single hour to your appointed time, as 'Antarah[23] emphasizes in one of his poems:

وَلاَ تَفِرَّ إِذا مَا خُضْتَ مَعْرَكَةً فَمَا يَزِيدُ فِرَارُ الْمَرْءِ فِي الأَجَلِ

Do not flee once you have gone deep into a battle, for flying before the enemy will never defer your appointed time (*ajal*).

Thus everybody has his own *ajal*, and every day is a step towards that fated time. Before the philosophic eye of the *Jāhilī* poet there unfolds itself a magnificent and tragic panorama of all mankind marching steadily towards the ultimate end.

يَا حَارِ مَا طَلَعَتْ شَمْسٌ وَلاَ غَرَبَتْ إِلاَّ تَقَرَّبَ آجَالٌ لِمِيعَادِ

Listen, Ḥārith! There never rises the sun and never does it set but that the *ājāl* (pl. of *ajal*) draw nearer the promised time (*mī'ād*).[24]

This is, indeed, a very gloomy view of life, the whole span of life being conceived of as a series of calamitous events, governed not by the natural law of growth and decay, but by the inscrutable will of a dark, blind, semi-personal Being, from whose strong grip there can be no escape. And only against the background of this tragical atmosphere can we understand the real historical significance of the Qur'anic world-view.

In fact, the Qur'an offers an entirely different picture of the human condition. All of a sudden, the sky clears up, the darkness is dissipated, and in place of the tragic sense of life there appears a new bright vista of the eternal life. The difference between the two world-views on this problem is exactly like the difference between Night and Day.

In the new Islamic system, too, Allah as the Creator marks the starting point of human existence. But already here, at the very outset, we begin to observe a fundamental change. In the old *Jāhilī* system, the creative activity of Allah is both the beginning and the end of His intervention in human affairs. He does not as a rule take

care of what He has brought into existence just like an irresponsible father who never cares for his children; the task is taken over, as we have just seen, by another Being called *Dahr*.

In the Islamic system, on the contrary, creation marks just the beginning of the Divine rule over the created things. All human affairs even the minutest and apparently most insignificant details of life are put under the strict supervision of Allah. And the most important point about this is that this God, according to the Qur'an, is the God of justice, who never does any wrong (*zulm*) to anybody. No more *Dahr*, nor more secret machinations of *Dahr*. The very existence itself of some such thing as *Dahr* is flatly denied and dismissed as a mere product of groundless imagination. The whole course of human life is now placed under the absolute control of the will of God.

Of course, the problem of death still remains. Death is inevitable.

﴿أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدْرِككُّمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشَيَّدَةٍ﴾

Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, though you hide yourselves in castles solidly built.

An-Nisā', 4:80 [78]

Even the Prophet himself cannot be an exception.

﴿وَمَا جَعَلْنَا لِبَشَرٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ الْخُلْدَ أَفَإِين مِّتَّ فَهُمُ الْخَالِدُونَ، كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ﴾

Never have We assigned immortality to any man before you (Muḥammad). What! if you die, can other people live forever? Every soul must taste of death.

Anbiyā', 21:35-36 [34-35]

This is because Allah has "measured out death to all mankind".[25] Allah "gives life and gives death"[26] as He likes.

The concept of *ajal* continues to exist in the Islamic system just as it did in *Jāhiliyyah*. Here, too, *ajal* is the 'appointed term', and, when applied to the concept of human life, it means nothing other than 'death' as the ultimate term determined by Allah.

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُم مِّن طِينٍ ثُمَّ قَضَى أَجَلاً وَأَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى عِندَهُ﴾

It is He who has created you from clay, then has determined a term (ajal). So there is an ajal (for your life) clearly stated with Him.

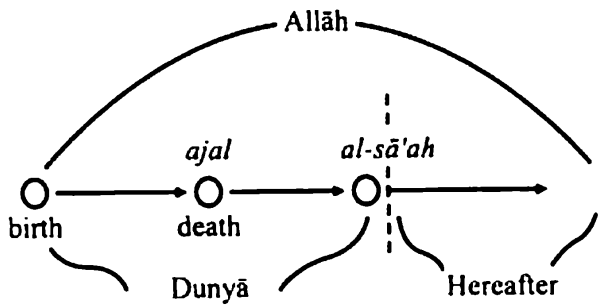
Al-An'ām, 6:2

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَن تَمُوتَ إِلاَّ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ كِتَابًا مُّؤَجَّلاً﴾

No soul ever dies except by the permission of Allah, at a term clearly dated (in the knowledge of God).[27]

Āli 'Imrān, 3:139 [145]

The inevitability of death in the form of *ajal*, however, does not lead, in the Islamic conception, as it used to do in *Jāhiliyyah*, to a gloomy pessimistic view of human existence, because the *ajal* in this sense is not, in the new *weltanschauung*, the real terminal point of existence. It is, on the contrary, the very threshold of a new and entirely different kind of life—the eternal life (*khulūd*). In this system, the *ajal*, *i.e.* death, of each individual man is but a middle stage in the whole length of his life, a turning-point in his life history situated between the *Dunyā* and the Hereafter. Unlike the *Jāhilī* view of life which would see nothing beyond the *ajal*, the Qur'anic view sees precisely beyond the *ajal*, the Qur'anic view sees precisely beyond the *ajal*, the real life, real because it is 'eternal' (*khālid*) as the Qur'an is never tired of emphasizing.



And just as each individual has his own *ajal*, the *Dunyā* itself has its ultimate *ajal*, which is nothing but the 'Hour' (*al-sā'ah*), the

Day of Judgment. Beyond this final *ajal*, man steps into the new life of eternity. It is to be remarked that in the Qur'anic conception, this whole process, comprising both the life in the *Dunyā* and the life in the Hereafter, is under the administration of Allah, as shown in the above diagram. This raises, within the limits of the first half of the course of human existence—*i.e.*, the stretch of the line between birth and death—the very famous problem of *Qadā' wa qadar* (Divine 'Foreordination'), which is admittedly one of the most difficult problems that the later Islamic thought had to face.

Whether this thought of Divine Foreordination is already there in the Qur'an clearly stated and formulated as the theologians assert, or whether, as Dr. Daud Rahbar thinks,[28] the theologians are here reading into the Qur'an their own thought, is a difficult point to decide. But, however this may be, it is quite certain that the Qur'an itself raises this problem in an extremely acute form by the very fact that it puts the whole course of human life under the absolute control of the will of God.

It is not necessary for us in the present study to try to explore the intricacies of this problem. The problem, in my view, rather belongs properly to Islamic theology. Besides, all the relevant passages in the Qur'an have been examined philologically by Dr. Rahbar. So I would be content here with adding few words to what he has said on this problem.

That the concept of Foreordination is not an invention of the theologians is shown by the fact that even before the rise of Islam, almost exactly the same idea seems to have been circulating among some Arabs of a special religious tendency, and that even outside the small circle of the Hanīfs. The great poet Labīd who, as I have pointed out before, was famous for his deep religious nature, was one of those who openly professed the belief in Divine Foreordination. Here is an example:

لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ النَّاسُ مَحْوَ كِتَابِهِ أَنَّى وَلَيْسَ قَضَاؤُهُ بِمُبَدَّلِ

We men are not able to erase what He (*i.e.* Allah) has once written down (*kitāb*). How can this be, when His *qadā'* is absolutely unalterable.[29]

The word *qadar* is also used by Labīd with the same meaning:[30]

وَلاَ أَقُولُ إِذَا مَا أَزَمَةٌ أَزَمَتْ يَا وَيْحَ نَفْسِي مِما أَحْدَثَ الْقَدَرُ

Even in deep distress I never say 'Woe is me!' for what *qadar* has brought about.

That this and similar verses should not be lightly explained away as forgery as it used to be done will be clear to all those who are at all familiar with the profound religiousness and the natural monotheistic tendency of this poet.

We must notice, further, that this usage of the word *kitāb* "what Allah has written", *i.e.* Divine Decree, is in no way an isolated example.

In the *Dīwān* of the Hudhayl tribe,[31] for instance, Usāmah b. al-Hārith uses the same word in the same sense, bewailing the hapless fate of his tribe, and says:

وَكَـانَ عَلَيْـهِمْ كِتَابَا

...but such was the *kitāb* (foreordination) for them!

Notes

1. ﴿ذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ﴾(الأنعام:102).
   This then is Allah your Lord. There is no god save Him, the Creator of everything (*Al-An'ām*, 6:102).
2. *Dīwān*, p. 128, v. 2.
3. See above, Chapter 4, section II. The verb *barā*, for *bara'a*, is a synonym of *khalaqa*, meaning 'to create'.
4. *Dīwān*, p. 60, v. 8. *Mubdī*, for *mubdī'* comes from the verb *abda'a* meaning "to bring something into existence for the first time": another synonym of *khalaqa*.
5. *Al-Hamāsah,* CLXXV, 3.
6. For a more detailed account of this *Jāhilī* philosophy of life, see *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran,* chap. V.
7. Reading *namurru* instead of *tamurru*. The poet is 'Abīd b. al-Abras (*Dīwān*, Beirut, 1958, IX, 21). It is to be remarked that of the two *'arwāhs*, the first is the plural of *rūh* (soul), and the second is the plural of *rīh* (wind). It seems to me that Charles Lyall has completely

missed the sense of this verse in his translation of the *Dīwān* of this poet.

8. "If only there were no arrow of *'Awḍ* stuck into my whole body and limbs...", said by the *Jāhilī* poet al-Find al-Zimmānī (*al-Ḥamāsah* CLXXVI, 3) lamenting over the decay due to old-age.
9. (The wind and the rain) have completely changed the aspect of the abodes together with the decay due to time. Indeed, no guarantee there is against the destructive power of *Zamān*. (Ṭarafah, *Dīwān*, ed. M. Seligsohn, Paris, 1901, IV, 4)
10. "No sooner does a way of living seem enjoyable to us than it is destroyed completely by *Zamān*, whether it be old or new." ('Antarah, *Dīwān*, p. 61, v. 5)
11. "If my locks grow grey, it is the work of *'Asr*, and the inevitable end of all that are young is grey hair." ('Abd Allāh Salimah, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XVIII, v. 11)
12. *al-Ḥamāsah*, CCLXXIII, 6.
13. Iyās b. al-Aratt, *al-Ḥamāsah*, CDLXXXV, 3.
14. Juraybah b. al-Ashyam, a *Mukhaḍram* poet, al-Ḥamāsah, CCLX, 4.
15. Imr' al-Qays, *Dīwān*, Cairo, 1958, II, vv. 10-11.
16. 'Amr b. Qamī'ah, *Dīwān*, ed. Lyall, Cambridge, 1919, III, v. 11.
17. On these and other related words in pre-Islamic literature, see an interesting philological study by Werner Caskel: *Das Schicksal in der altarabischen Poesie*, Leipzig, 1926.
18. *Dīwān al-Hudhaliyyīn*, II, p. 62, v. 3, Sakhr al-Ghayy.
19. Of course it often happens the words are used in a more loose sense. Then they are simply synonyms of *dahr*.
20. *al-Ḥamāsah*, CCCX, 4. The poem is attributed to al-Salakah by al-Tibrīzī, while al-Marzūqi attributes it to "a woman whose name is unknown".
21. al-Nābighah, *Dīwān*, V, 4. As regards the important concept of 'writing', see last paragraph of this chapter.
22. 'Urwah b. al-Ward, in the famous "Song of an Outlaw", *Dīwān*, Beirut, 1953, p. 42, v. 2.
23. 'Antarah, *Dīwān*, p.132, v. 5.
24. 'Abīd b. al-Abraṣ, *Dīwān*, XVIII, 2.
25. 56:60.
26. 9:117 [116].
27. Note the word *kitāb* ("what is written") in this verse.
28. *Op. cit.* the chapters on *Qadā* and *Qadar*.
29. *Dīwān*, ed. Huber-Brockelmann, Leiden, 1891, XLII, 2.
30. Cited by Caskel, *op. cit*, p. 20, Labīd, XII, 18.
31. *Dīwān al-Hudhaliyyīn*, II, p. 197, v. 1.

CHAPTER 6

Communicative Relation Between God and Man: Non-linguistic Communication

I. The 'Signs' of God

There are two chief types of mutual 'understanding' between God and man. One is linguistic or verbal, that is, through the use of a human language common to both parties, and the other is non-verbal, that is, through the use of 'natural sign' on the part of God and gestures and bodily movements on the part of man. In both cases, quite naturally the initiative is taken by God Himself, the human side of the phenomenon being basically a matter of 'response' to the initiative displayed by God.

The will of God to open up direct communication between Him and mankind manifests itself, according to the Qur'an, in the form of His "sending down" the *āyāt* (pl. of *āyah*, 'signs'). On this basic level, there is no essential difference between linguistic and non-linguistic Signs; both types are equally divine *āyāt*. Revelation (*waḥy*) which is the typical form of communication from God to man by means of language, is in this sense only a partial phenomenon comprised with several others under the wider concept of God-man communication. This is why the Qur'an actually calls the revealed words *āyāt* without distinguishing them from other 'signs' of a non-linguistic nature that are also called *āyāt*.

But since the linguistic or verbal *āyāt* form by themselves a very particular class, which is better designated by the technical term of Revelation (*waḥy*), and since, moreover, this class is in some important respects quite different in nature and structure from the

non-verbal *āyāt*, and has so many characteristic features that are not shared by the latter, we may justifiably regard it as an independent unit and give it a separate treatment. This will be the special subject of the following chapter.

The present chapter, in this sense, may be considered rather an introduction to the more specific and more important problem of Revelation, for it purports to give, first and foremost, the more general structural characteristics of Divine communication comprising both the verbal type and the non-verbal one. In any case most of what will be said in this chapter will apply equally well to the phenomenon of Revelation, of which it will provide a kind of background knowledge. This is true of course only of communication in the descending direction, *i.e.*, the case in which God is the sender of the signs and man the receiver. As to communication in the ascending direction, *i.e.*, from man to God, there is too immense a difference between the verbal type and the non-verbal type that the two cannot in any way be treated in the same breath. Let us begin with the communication from God to man.

God is showing 'signs' at every moment, *āyah* after *āyah*, to those who have enough intelligence to grasp them as 'signs'. The meaning of this, in the sense in which the Qur'an understands it, is that all that we usually call natural phenomena, such as rain, wind, the structure of the heaven and the earth, alternation of day and night, the turning about of the winds, *etc.*, all these should be understood not as simple natural phenomena, but as so many 'signs' or 'symbols' pointing to the Divine intervention in human affairs, as evidences of the Divine Providence, care and wisdom displayed by God for the good of human beings on this earth.

Just as a waymark must not cause a traveller to rivet his eyes on itself, but direct him towards a certain place which is the real destination of his travel, so every natural phenomenon, instead of absorbing our attention, as a natural phenomenon, and transfixing it immovably to itself, should act always in such a way that our attention be directed towards something beyond it. At this depth of understanding, a natural phenomenon is no longer a natural phenomenon; it is a 'sign' or 'symbol'—*āyah* as the Qur'an calls it. And this Something Beyond to which all the so-called natural phenomena point as 'signs' in the Qur'anic conception, God Himself, or more precisely, this or that aspect of God such as His

Benevolence, His Power, His Sovereignty, His Justice, *etc.*

The Qur'anic conception may be made more understandable by a comparison with the philosophical *weltanschauung* of a modern Western philospher, Karl Jaspers who, interestingly enough, has made precisely this point one of the foundation-stones of his system. In this system much attention is paid to the problem of the symbolic nature of the world. According to Jaspers, we live at several different levels. When we leave the level of the normal, daily commonplace reason (*Verstand*), at which natural things including man appear to our eyes simply as natural things, and step into the realm of *Existenz*, we find ourselves suddenly in a strange world, standing in front of God, whom he calls philosophically *das Umgreifende* meaning something infinitely great comprising everything from above. This All-Compriser keeps talking to us, not directly, but through the natural things. Things no longer exist here as natural, objective things, but they are symbols, through which the All-Compriser talks to us. Things at this stage are 'ciphers' (*Chiffer* as he calls them) or cryptograms. So that the whole universe is represented as a big *Chifferschrift*, a book written entirely in cryptograms. In other words the world is a big book of symbols, a book which only those who live at the level of *Existenz* are able read. This would exactly correspond to the Qur'anic thought according to which all things are in truth *āyāt* of Allah, and their symbolic nature can only grasped by those who have *'aql* (intellect) who can 'think' (*tafakkur*) in the true sense of the word.

Regarding the problem as to whether or not this usage of the word *āyah* originated by the Qur'an, we should remark that it was not certainly in the Bedouin tradition, that is to say, in the genuine Arabic language. As far as I know, there is no trace of the word having been used in a religious sense; it is always used in the naturalistic sense. This, however, does not seem to be true of the Ḥanīfitic circle. The poet Labīd, for example, who, as we saw, shows a markedly Ḥanīfitic coloring in both his diction and conception, has the following verse:

وَالْمَاءُ وَالنِّيرَانُ مِنْ آيَاتِهِ ... فِيهِنَّ مَوْعِظَةٌ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَجْهَلِ

And water and fire (*i.e.*, the rain and the heavenly lights such as the sun, moon and the stars) are His (*i.e.* Allah's) *āyāt*. In them there is a

lesson to learn for those who are not *jāhil* (*i.e.*, those who are capable of thinking rightly).[1]

The problem, however, is not of central importance for our present purposes. What is more important is the semantic structure of the concept of *āyah* in the Qur'anic system itself. To this problem we shall now turn.

The Divine *āyāt* as the Qur'an understands the word in a general sense, comprise as I said at the outset, both verbal and non-verbal symbols. The verbal type, *i.e.*, Revelation, is, in the nature of the case, much more precise than the other type, being essentially conceptual. It presents Divine Will in an articulate form. In other words, what God wants to convey to the human mind is here given analytically, one element after another, each element being given as much conceptual precision as possible. While in the non-verbal one, Divine Will is manifested globally, not analytically. And since in this latter case there can be no conceptual precision, the message conveyed must necessarily be extremely vague and inarticulate. But the non-verbal *āyāt* have one conspicuous advantage: they can be and *are* actually addressed to mankind at large without any discrimination; moreover they can be given directly without any intermediary, while the verbal type can be given directly only to one particular person, the Prophet, and only indirectly and mediately to mankind. All men are living in the very midst of the world of divine symbols, and these are accessible to anybody if only he has the mental and spiritual capacity to interpret them as symbols.

Now, as we know already from what has been said in the first chapters of this book on the methodological principles of semantics, the semantical analysis of the concept of *āyah* in the Qur'an will consist in our trying to understand what it means in terms of the 'semantic field' which this focus-word forms around itself. We have, in other terms, to examine the words of decisive importance—the key-words—that surround it in the Qur'anic contexts.

For this purpose, the most important thing to remark is, in my view, the fact that, given the Divine *āyāt*, whether verbal or non-verbal, the only possible human response is, according to the Qur'an, either 'acceptance' or 'rejection'—*tasdīq* lit. "regarding and accepting, as true" or *takdhīb* lit. "regarding as false". Man either accepts the *āyāt* as Truth (*haqq*) or rejects them altogether as Falsehood

(*bāṭil*) having no reality behind them, mere products of fantasy and groundless imagination. And of course, *taṣdīq* (acceptance) is the first step towards *īmān* (belief), and *takdhīb* is the very gist of *kufr*, the only different being that the former pair (*taṣdīq-takdhīb*) is much more realistic and naked in conception than the latter pair (*īmān-kufr*) which is a degree higher in scale of abstraction. In the Qur'an we witness *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb* as two opposite principles engaged in a fierce life-and-death conceptual battle with each other. And this is one of the basic oppositions which, as I said earlier, contribute towards producing that intense dramatic tension that reigns over the Qur'anic world-view. In this sense, the relation between *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb* must be considered the very axis around which revolves the whole semantic field, and which, therefore, assigns to each of the key-terms its proper place in this conceptual system. All this must be considered in more detail now.

Let me begin by giving in a tabular form the general conceptual structure of the entire semantic field of *āyah*.

The beginning of the whole thing is the Divine act of "sending down" (*tanzīl*) the 'signs'. Without this initial act on the part of God, there could be no religion in the Islamic sense of the word.

This Divine act, however, would remain barren and effectless if there were no man there to understand its profound meaning, as the Qur'an says:

﴿قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

We have made clear to you the signs (āyāt), if you can understand

Āli 'Imrān, 3:114 [118]

However much God calls men to the right path by showing them *āyah* after *āyah*, if all men were incapable of understanding the meaning of them like the *Kāfirs* who are "deaf, dumb and blind and do not understand",[2] then the *āyāt* could not work.

The *āyāt* begin to show their positive effect only when man shows on his part a deep understanding. Here begins the human side of the matter. And this very important human activity is expressed by a number of verbs (see *Table*, Column 2) which designate various aspects of 'understanding'.

ĀYAH

Divine Part			Human Part			
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
God "sends down" the *āyāt*	Man understands the meaning of the *āyāt*	The organ of under-standing	The meanings of the *āyāt*	The human response	The immediate consequence	The final result
Tanzīl	*`aqala* *fahima* *faqiha* *tafakkara* *tadhakkkara* *tawassama* etc.	*lubb* (pl. *albāb*) *qalb* (*fu`ād*)	[A] *ni`mah* *raḥmah* etc. (*tabshīr*) [B] *intiqām* *`iqāb* *`adhāb* *sakhat* etc. (*indhār*)	[a] *taṣdīq* [b] *takdhīb*	[I] *shukr* (A + a) [II] *taqwā* (B + a) [III] *kufr* (A.B + b)	*īmān* (I, II) *kufr* (III)

According to the Qur'an, this human act of understanding has its source in the psychological capacity called *lubb* or *qalb* (the 'heart') (Column 3). All the mental activities mentioned in Column 2 are nothing but concrete manifestations of this basic mental capacity or principle. The 'heart' is the very thing which enables man to 'understand' the meaning of the Divine *āyāt*. So, when this principle is sealed and covered and does not function properly man cannot show any understanding at all.

﴿وَطُبِعَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لاَ يَفْقَهُونَ﴾

And a seal has been set upon their hearts (qalb); so they cannot understand.

Al-Tawbah, 9:88 [87]

The *qalb* (heart) is naturally made in such a way that it might understand the meaning of the *āyāt* if it functions normally. What does it see in those *āyāt* if it understands them properly? This is the problem of Column 4. It concerns the meaning of the Divine *āyāt* that are revealed to an understanding *qalb*. For such a *qalb* they are mainly symbols of two things, that are diametrically opposed to each other. Some *āyāt* symbolize the Divine Goodness, the infinite love, benevolence and clemency of God, while others symbolize the wrath of God, the imminence of dreadful punishment and vengeance. In the former case, the Divine act of showing an *āyah*—or rather, the transmisson of it through the Prophet to mankind—is called *tabshīr* ('the bringing of good news', 'evangel' in the etymological sense). In the latter case, it is called *indhār* (warning) or more nakedly, *wa'īd* (threatening). Correspondingly, the same Prophet is called in the Qur'an sometimes *mubashshir*, a 'bringer of good news', and sometimes *mundhir*, a 'warner'.

The next Column (5) concerns the human response to the *āyāt*. The basic human response consists in either "regarding and accepting the *āyāt* as true" (*taṣdīq*) or "regarding them as totally false and nonsense and rejecting them" (*takdhīb*). This bifurcation of the human response to the *āyāt* is very important because it is directly conducive to 'belief' or 'faith' on the one hand, and 'disbelief' on the other. The immediate consequence of this bifurcated human response together with its semantic structure, is shown in Column 6 of our

synaptic table. When man accepts as true the Divine favor as symbolized by the *āyāt* of the first category—[A]+[a]—the result is *shukr* (gratitude) [I] in religious sense. When he accepts also as true the *āyāt* of the second category—[B]+[a]—it results in *taqwā* [II], which, as we have seen, means originally and basically the fear of the austere Lord of the Day of Judgment and His chastisement. When, on the contrary man regards [A] as false—[A]+[b]—the result is *kufr* [III]. As we know already, this is soon extended to [B]; then—[A] [B]+[b]—*kufr* acquires the technical meaning of 'disbelief'.

At the final stage, represented by Column 7 in our diagram, [I] and [II] united into one, and the concept of *īmān* (belief) in the Islamic sense of the word is born of this combination. And *īmān* here stands opposed to *kufr* in the sense of [A] [B]+[b].

It will be evident that all this, beginning with the Divine act of sending down the *āyāt* and ending with the human act of either belief or disbelief constitutes a coherent conceptual system. It forms a very compact network of associations, in which each one of the words is related to all other members of the network in a peculiar way, and each one of them is tinged and colored by being related to all others. The concept of *āyah* and its field furnishes also a good occasion to show by a concrete example what kind of a thing a 'semantic field' is, and how it is to be distinguished from a chance combination of words. A 'semantic field', of which we have here an ideal example before our eyes, is not a mere context, in which a number of words happen to be used together in a casual combination.[3] In a semantic field, nothing is casual; every combination within the field is essential in the sense that it represents an essential aspect of the *weltanschauung*.

This, be it remarked incidentally, should not be taken in the sense that all the words that belong in this particular field cannot enter into other combinations in other semantic fields. One and the same word may and usually does belong to several different fields. The word *qalb* is not exclusively the locus of *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb*; it is the locus of a number of other mental activities. The word *'aqala* does not exclusively and necessarily mean "understanding Divine *āyāt*". But as long as it works within this particular field of *āyāt*, it has a very particular and very important semantic coloring which it has acquired by being associated with all other members of this

system and influenced by the peculiar structure of the whole field itself.

This kind of semantic coloring is very delicate and subtle to grasp, but also extremely important in determining the meaning of word. The meaning of a word is not exhausted by its basic meaning. It has also a relational meaning and this latter always comes from the essential combinations into which it enters in a given system.

II. Divine Guidance

In the preceding section we have examined the general structure of the semantic field which forms itself around the focus-word *āyah*. The basic part of this semantic field may be described more briefly as follows: (1) God sends down the *āyah*; (2) man responds to it by either accepting it as Truth (*taṣdīq*), or rejecting it as Falsehood (*takdhīb*); (3) the former naturally leads to 'belief' (*īmān*) and the latter to 'disbelief' (*kufr*).

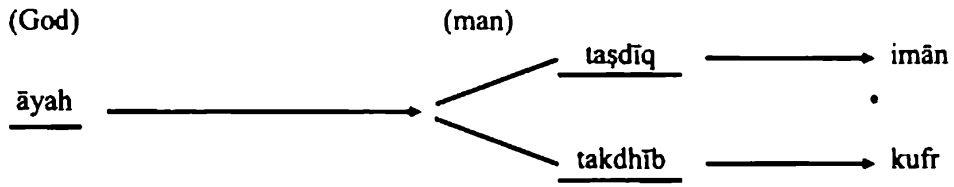


Diagram I

This, however, is not the only semantic field of *āyah* to be found in the Qur'an. In fact, the Qur'an offers two different fields formed around the central idea of Allah's sending down the *āyāt*. The interesting point is that they do not exist in the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* quite independently of each other as two separate fields, but are formed in such a way that they correspond exactly to each other as regards their basic structure. As far as concerns the abstract skeleton framework, both are almost exactly the same; only the same structure is used twice, being each time provided with different conceptual clothing produce two different semantic fields. And this formal correspondence between two sister fields reflecting one and the same piece of reality—the communicative activity of God, in our particular case—in two different ways is exceedingly important for our purpose, because here we see the Qur'an

interpreting itself, so to speak, before our eyes.

It is one of the characteristic features of this second system that the 'articulation' of the field is done in terms of a set of concepts which, unlike those used in the first system, have apparently nothing to do with communication.

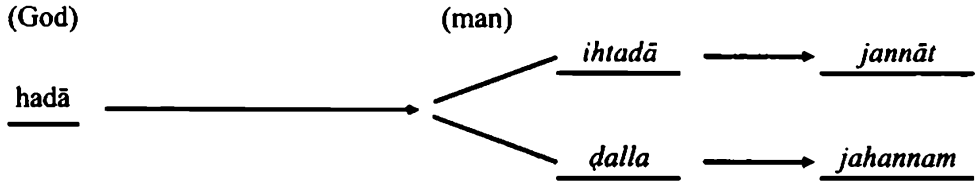


Diagram II

Here the concept of *āyāt*, to begin with, is replaced by the concept of 'Guidance' (*hudā*). This would imply that God's act of sending down the *āyāt* is, according to the Qur'anic view, just the same thing as His guidance; the *āyāt* are but the concrete expression of the Divine intention to guide mankind to the right path. And just as in the first system man could choose either *taṣdīq* or *takdhīb*, so in the second system man is free to respond to this divine act in one of the two possible ways, *i.e.*, either by *ihtidā'*, 'following the guidance' that has been offered or *ḍalāl*, "going out of the right way" by refusing to follow the guidance thiat has been so graciously offered to him. And those who choose the first way are on the road to Heavenly Garden (*jannah*) while those who choose the second are on the road to Hell (*jahannam*).

All this is still only the first half of the whole picture. The second half is no less important than the first, and although at the Qur'anic stage the two *are simply there existing side by side without apparently causing any trouble* at all, they later begin to clash with one another, and, particularly in theology, end by standing in sharp unequivocal opposition.

In this second version, the whole field is viewed from the standpoint of the Foreordination (*qaḍā' wa qadar*) which we have already examined in connection with the problem of the ontological relation between God and man. From this particular point of view, everything that happens on this earth is due ultimately to God's Will. In this perspective, a man who takes the right way preferring *ihtidā'* to *ḍalāl* or who swerves away from the right way, by choosing *ḍalāl*

instead of *ihtidā'*, is not, in reality, choosing anything for himself by himself. His very act of responding to Divine guidance in either way is the necessary result of God's Will. He chooses *dalāl* or *ihtidā'* not because he wills, but simply because God himself wills that he should do so. In other words both man's *ihtidā'* and *dalāl*, are equally due to Divine Will *(mashī'ah)*. Thus we read:

﴿ مَن يَشَإِ اللَّهُ يُضْلِلْهُ وَمَن يَشَأْ يَجْعَلْهُ عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴾

Whomsoever God will, He makes him go astray, and whomsoever He will, He sets him on a straight path.

Al-An'ām, 6:39

This second interpretation of the matter may be shown conveniently in the form of a simple diagram *(III)*. And if we compare the two diagrams *(II* and *III)* with one another, we will see immediately the fundamental difference between this and the first one.

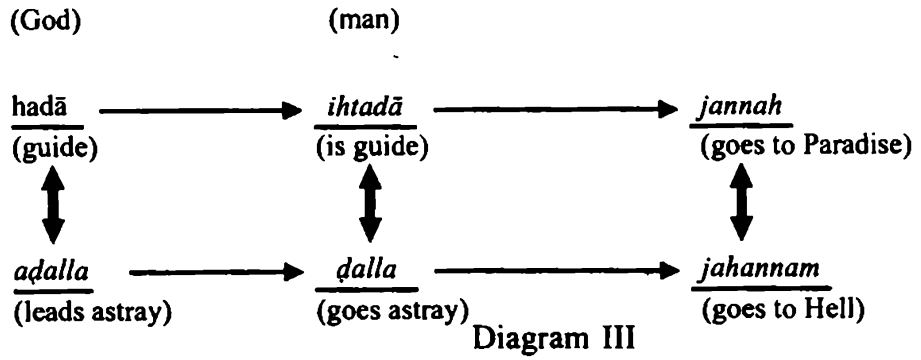


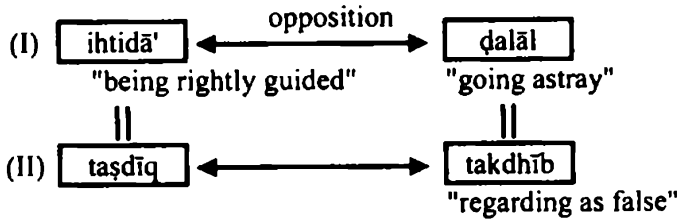
Diagram III

The comparison will make it clear that in the second system, it is not the case, as it is in the first, that man responds to Divine guidance either with *ihtidā'* (being guided) or with *ḍalāl* (going astray). Rather, he responds to Divine *hudā* with *ihtidā'*, and to *iḍlāl* (leading astray) with *ḍalāl* (going astray). This is tantamount to saying that man, in this view, is no longer free to choose either *ihtidā'* or *ḍalāl*, given Divine guidance. Everything would have seemed to be already fixed and decided from the very beginning. So man's "going astray" is nothing but the direct and necessary result of God's *iḍlāl* (leading astray). And this Divine act of "leading astray" none can resist, in such a case, not even the Prophet himself can ever hope to lead anybody back to the right path, as the Qur'an itself repeatedly emphasizes.

Thus we see in this second system, already at the initial stage, a basic opposition of *hadā* (guiding) and *adalla* (leading astray) and this opposition runs through the whole system, so that we have here two lines running parallel to each other from the very beginning to the end.

The existence of these two different 'versions' of one and the same 'story' and the contrast between them in the Qur'an could not but raise later among the Muslim thinkers grave problems regarding the concept of human freedom and moral responsibility. For once you adopt a strictly logical point of view, you must recognize the existence of a logical contradiction between these two systems. Only, the standpoint of the Qur'an is not that of pure logic; the Qur'anic thought unfolds itself on a plane which is essentially different from that of the logic of human reason. And as long as one keeps oneself on this level of thinking there can be no place for such a problem. In any case, the Qur'an itself did not raise the problem of human freedom in this particular form.

Without going any further into the theological problem of human freedom and God's justice, let us now turn to the inner semantic structure of the concept of Guidance, which is admittedly one of the most important concepts the Qur'an. We have seen above how the same field is conceptualized in the Qur'an in two different ways. But whichever system we take as basic, we meet with always the same conceptual opposition of *ihtidā'* and *ḍalāl* as soon as the human part begins. This is common to both systems. And this opposition of *ihtidā'* and *ḍalāl* is to be found almost everywhere in the Qur'an; indeed the two constitute one of the commonest and most frequently used conceptual pairs in the Qur'an.[4]



As I have said before, this pair has its counterpart, in another semantic field, in the opposition of *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb* as the two basic forms of human response to the *āyāt* sent down by God. But the first pair (*I*) has something which distinguishes it definitely from the second (*II*). Unlike the latter, the opposition *ihtidā'....dalāl* is not

conceivable without there being a more basic concept underlying it: that of 'Way'. The concept of 'Way' is the 'focus-word' of the entire field. In other words, the concept of 'Way' plays in this semantic field the role which the concept of 'sign' (*āyah*) plays in the other. In the Qur'an, this concept of 'Way' is signified by various words, *sabīl, ṣirāṭ, ṭarīq* being the most important ones.

Likewise, *ihtidā'* and *ḍalāl* have each a number of synonyms. In place of *ihtidā'* are sometimes used, for example, *rushd* or *rashād* meaning "to enter on the right path", *qaṣd* meaning "to take one's way toward the right destination". As to *ḍalāl* (verb *ḍalla*), many different words are actually used in the Qur'an as synonyms: *'amiha*, for example, which means "to wander about away from the right way" (ex. 2:14 [15]), *qasaṭa* ("to swerve from the right way") (ex. 72:14-15), *nakaba* or *nakiba* with the same meaning (ex. 23:76 [74]),[5] *tāha* ("to get lost in the desert and wander in bewilderment") (ex. 5:29 [26]), and *ghawā, ghawiya* (inf. *ghayy* and *ghawāyah*), "to go astray" (ex. 7:143 [146]).

It will be easy to see that there underlies all these concepts the very basic concept of Way. The problem is always: Does a man take the right way leading to his true destination, that is, God and the salvation of his soul, or does he deviate from it and wander about blindly in the desert of godlessness? But what is more important to remark is that the Way in question is not simply a way; the most decisive element in this image of Way in the Qur'anic conception is its being 'straight' (*mustaqīm*).

The Way which God indicates through His *āyāt* is 'straight'. This means in the Qur'anic context that if you but follow its line, it will lead you straight to salvation. And this straightness of the Divine Way stands in sharp contrast to 'crookedness' (*'iwaj*) of all other ways. Crookedness means in this context that the way, instead of leading you to your destination, leads you away from it.

﴿وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَن سَبِيلِهِ﴾

(God commands, saying:) This is My straight way, so do you follow it. Follow not other ways (subul pl. of sabīl, with the implication that they are all 'crooked') lest they scatter you away from His way.

Al-An'ām, 6:154 [153]

So again we see two important concepts opposed to each other as two conflicting principles: 'straightness' and 'crookedness' in the semantic field of the Way-concept. It is evident that 'straight' and 'crooked' are here value-words, for they stand for religious values, one positive and the other negative. The opposition stands out with particular clearness because the Qur'an describes the *Kāfirs* as constantly trying to make the 'straight' way of God 'crooked'.

﴿لِمَ تَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مَنْ ءَامَنَ تَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا﴾

Why do you try to turn away from the way of God those who believe, desiring to make it crooked ('iwaj).[6]

Āli 'Imrān, 3:94 [99]

﴿... فَأَذَّنَ مُؤَذِّنٌ بَيْنَهُمْ أَن لَّعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَهُم بِالْآخِرَةِ كَافِرُونَ﴾

The curse of God is on the evildoers (i.e. the Kāfirs) who turn (people away from the way of God, desiring to make it crooked!

Al-A'rāf, 7:42-43 [44-45]

As regards these concepts which, as we have just seen, constitute a large independent semantic field, we should observe that this latter was not at all a new field introduced by the Qur'an for the first time into the Arabic vocabulary. On the contrary, it was a very old field. It was already there in *Jāhiliyyah*, it used to play no less an important role in *Jāhiliyyah*, the only difference being that in *Jāhiliyyah* its importance was 'material' while in Islam its significance lies wholly in its metaphorical application.

For the people living in the desert, the problem of knowing the right way or getting lost in a vast tract of sand was naturally one of life and death. In those days each tribe had its own territory. Within the limited confines of the territory, no serious problem could arise concerning the right path to follow but once outside their own familiar territory, most of them were helpless; there they had to stand face to face with a vast, limitless expanse of sand full of 'horrors' (*ahwāl*), which they often described—and must have really felt—as an uncouth monster ready to pounce upon them at any moment, and prey upon them. In such a situation it is quite understandable that the *Jāhilī* Arabs developed a whole set of conceptual network having

reference to *hudā* and 'way'. Many different kinds of way were distinguished, and the desert itself was named differently according as it had such and such a property or not: whether, for example, it had water or not, whether it was traversed by a clear plain road or trackless, whether it was a vast waste without any way—marks, *etc.* Thus, to give only one example out of many, the word *yahmā'* was used particularly for a dangerous desert in which it was absolutely impossible for anybody to tell where the right way was, an immense plain of sand with no beaten path. There was even a particular verb for walking at random in this kind of desert (*'asafa*):

مُعْتَسِفُ الأَرْضِ مُقْفِرٌ جَهِلُ

A man travelling in the desert without knowing the way (*mu'tasif* from *'asafa*), alone (*i.e.* separated from his companions), utterly unacquainted with the place.[7]

And a stupid man who fell into the habit of bringing trouble upon himself by stepping thoughtlessly into such dangerous places was called *'issīf* (derived from the same root as *'asafa*). An interesting combination of these concepts is found in al-Shanfarā's famous *Lāmiyyah al-'Arab*:[8]

وَلَسْتُ بِمِحْيَارِ الظَّلاَمِ إِذَا انْتَحَتْ هُدَى الْهَوْجَلِ الْعِسِّيفِ يَهْمَاءُ هَوْجَلُ

I am not a man to get confused and perplexed in the darkness of night, when all of a sudden there looms right ahead a vast trackless desert and makes the thougtless fool lose his sense of *hudā*.

But the point is that all these words were understood chiefly in the most literal and material sense. The semantic field formed by words of this kind had no religious implication in *Jāhiliyyah*. Take for example the word *hudā* itself. It did not mean 'guidance' in the abstract sense; it meant more concretely "to show the way" particularly in the desert. *Hādī*—which is the participial form of the verb hadā (to guide)—in *Jāhiliyyah* was a man with a specialized knowledge of all the possible ways in the desert, whose profession was to lead men in the right path until they reached safely their destination. Desert was an extremely dangerous place, and even the professional guides could at any moment go astray. And it was the source of infinite pride and joy for a man to have the consciousness that he was superior in this respect to the professional guides. 'Abīd b. al-Abras

in one of his peoms says boastfully:

هَذَا وَدَاوِيَةٍ يَعْمَى الْهُدَاةُ بِهَا نَاءٍ مَسَافَتُهَا كَالْبُرْدِ دَيْمُومَه

جَاوَزْتُهَا بِعَلَنْدَاةٍ...

Enough! (Let us change our subject). Often an immense desert where even the professional guides (*hudāt* pl. of *hādī*) lose their way, its expanse stretching far, its sand looking like stripes on a Yemen robe, a limitless desert, I crossed on a tall stout camel.[9]

From this we see how vitally important it was those days for a man to be a good *hādī* himself or at least to have an experienced and reliable *hādī* with him. In the Qur'anic world too, the concept of *hādī* occupies a place of vital importance. Only, in the Qur'an, the *hādī* is God Himself, the Guide who never goes astray, who is therefore, absolutely reliable. Thus the Qur'an completely spiritualises the concept; it trasnfers it from the sphere of the most material aspect of human life to the level of the religious conception of human life. It was originally a concept relating to the experience of real travelling in the desert. Now in the Qur'an it is a religious concept relating to the course of human life metaphorically taken as a vast desert that man has to travel across.

Quite naturally, the same thing happened to the concept of 'way' itself. Thus *sirāṭ*[10] and *sabīl* that are the most representative words for 'way' in the Qur'an, are used evidently in a religious sense. The two are completely synonymous with each other in the Qur'an, and belong to the category of the key terms that go to determine the basic structure of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*. In pre-Islamic times too, the poets used these two words frequently, but always in a non-religious, material sense.

To say the truth, it is not the question of a few key-words taken separately. The whole semantic field of Way acquires in the Qur'an a deep symbolic meaning. The Qur'an, to put it in another way, transposes the entire conceptual field, with all the individual words that form it, from the material level of thinking to the religious level of thinking, spiritualizes it, and makes the metaphorical system of concepts thus produced the very basis on which to build up its religious philosophy.

III. The Worship as a Means of Communication

As already remarked, communication between God and man, verbal or verbal, is not a unilateral, but a bilateral, reciprocal phenomenon. Corresponding to the verbal type of communication from God to man, which is nothing but Revelation, there is *du'ā'* '(personal) prayer', conversation of the human heart with God, calling on God for His favor and aid, as the verbal type of communication in the ascending direction. In a similar way, the non-verbal Divine communication consisting in God's sending down the non-verbal *āyāt*, has a human counterpart in the services of worship and the religious exercises known in Islam as *ṣalāt*. In fact, *ṣalāt* or the Worship is susceptible of being looked at from various points of view. But from the particular standpoint of the present study, it is the non-linguistic variety of communication in the ascending direction, *i.e.* from man to God, for it is a formalized 'expression' on the part of man of the profound adoration which he feels in the presence of the Almighty. Man, instead of merely receiving the words and signs of God in a passive way, is strongly urged and commanded to express positively his feeling of adoration through a cycle of physical acts in company of others who share with him the same feeling.

Certainly *ṣalāt* contains some verbal elements,[11] because besides the prescribed bodily movements, reading from the Scripture, reciting the confession of faith (*shahādah*), the benediction for the Prophet *etc.*, constitute an important part of the Worship. But we must remark that the verbal elements *i.e.*, words, are used here in quite a different way from the words in personal prayers (*du'ā'*), for in *ṣalāt*, they are used ritualistically; all the words assume a markedly ritualistic significance, while in *du'ā* type of prayer, the words are used primarily for the expression *ad hoc* of strictly personal thoughts and feelings calling for expression at a particular moment. A man in his *du'ā*, in short, really 'means' what he says. While in *ṣalāt*, the words he utters do not describe his own personal ideas, but are by nature symbolic in the sense that they form part of the ritual. The verbal elements in *ṣalāt* are not at all verbal in the ordinary sense of the word. Moreover, what is important here is the whole pattern of worship, which is something far more than verbal. It is, on the whole, a non-verbal way of communication from man to God; it is the human way of establishing direct contact with God through the

prescribed form of ritual.

With Prophet Muḥammad, *ṣalāt* seems to go back, in spirit not in name, to his pre-Islamic days. All the important *Ḥadīths* agree in asserting that Muḥammad, following the practice of some of the devout Makkans, used to go in temporary seclusion from the worldly affairs to a cave on al-Ḥirā' near Makkah every year for a certain number of days. And according to the traditional account, this had continued for several years before finally the Truth visited him and raised him as Apostle of God. In the *Ḥadīths* this is called *taḥannuth.* Although the etymology of this word is obscure, it is fairly certain that it meant some devotional exercises. And perhaps we may consider it the pre-Islamic stage of the *ṣalāt.*

Be that as it may, the *ṣalāt*, the ritual prayer or Worship, soon became one of the major institutions of Islam, and was given an exceedingly important place among the religious duties as a distinctive feature of the nascent Muslim community. It is not necessary here to go into the details of this institution.[12] Let it suffice to note that *sujūd* (verb *sajada*), 'prostration', which is the very culmination of this type of worship, and which consists in the believer's prostrating with his forehead touching the ground before the object to be worshipped, was known among the pre-Islamic Arabs as the form of expressing the deepest admiration heightened to the degree of adoration. The poet al-Nābighah, for instance, describing the enthralling beauty of a girl, says:[13]

أَو دُرَّةٍ صَدَفِيَّةٍ غَوَّاصُهَا بَهِجٌ مَتَى يَرَهَا يُهِلُّ وَيَسْجُدُ

.....

لَوْ أَنَّهَا عَرَضَتْ لأَشْمَطَ رَاهِبٍ عَبَدَ الإِلَهَ صَرُورَةٍ مُتَعَبِّدِ

Or (she may be likened) to a large virgin pearl, before which the diver, in a glee, lifts up his voice in adoration and prostrates himself.

If such a girl showed herself to the eyes of a Christian monk with gray hair on his head, he would begin worshipping God (*i.e.* he would prostrate on the spot in admiration), even the monk who, unmarried, has spent all his life in pious devotion.

As to the basic meaning of *ṣalāt* we know that the verb *sallā* generally meant "to invoke blessings upon someone" in both the pre-

Qur'anic and the post-Qur'anic literature.[14] Here I give a very interesting example of its usage in pre-Islamic poetry.

The poet al-A'shā in describing how carefully wine is preserved, says:

وَقَابَلَهَا الرِّيحُ فِي دَنِّهَا وَصَلَّى عَلَى دَنِّهَا وَارْتَسَمْ

And (the wine-dealer) exposed it to the wind in a jar, then invoked blessings upon the jar and sought assistance from God (so that the wine might not turn sour).[15]

But far more important than this for our purpose is the fact that already in *Jāhiliyyah* the word was occasionally used to mean something which comes nearer to the Qur'anic concept of *ṣalāt*.

Thus 'Antarah in a poem which he composed in praise of the great Emperor of the Persian Empire Anūshirwān has left this extremely interesting verse:[16]

تُصَلِّي نَحْوَهُ مِنْ كُلِّ فَجٍّ مُلُوكُ الأَرْضِ وَهْوَ لَهَا إِمَامُ

All the kings of the earth pay homage to him from all places of the world (lit. from every valley-path); all people on earth turn their face towards him.

The word *imām* as used in this verse is interesting. It means the point upon which your gaze is turned and concentrated. In this sense it is synonymous with one of the most important Qur'anic terms in the field of *ṣalāt*: *al-qiblah* which means technically the direction to be faced in public worship. Significantly enough, the same poet actually uses the word *qiblah* precisely in this sense in reference to the same Emperor Anūshirwān:[17]

يَا قِبْلَةَ القُصَّادِ يَا تَاجَ العُلاَ

Qussād is the plural of *qāṣid*, "one who aims at something", "one who intends to go towards something". So the sentence means—addressing the Emperor—"Oh you the direction to which the gaze of all people is turned, Oh you crown of sublimity!"

As is evident, here the material content of *salāt* is different from the Islamic *salāt*, but the formal structure is the same; the only

difference consists in the fact that here the *qiblah*, instead of being the direction of Makkan Shrine, is the imperial palace of the Persian Emperor, and the worship itself is the Imperial cult, instead of being the divine cult of Allah.

Notes

1. Labīd, *Dīwān* XLII, v. 5. As regards the meaning of *jāhil*, I shall give a detailed later (see Chapter 8).
2. صُمٌّ بُكْمٌ عُمْيٌ فَهُمْ لاَ يَعْقِلُونَ 2:166 [171]
3. Take for example the Qur'anic verse "They (Moses and his page) forgot their fish" نسيَا حُوتَهُمَا (18:60 [61]). The combination of the two words 'forgetting' and 'fish' is quite casual. It is a mere context; it does not produce in any way a semantic field. Nobody would say that the verb *nasiya* (to forget) has acquired a special semantic from this particular combination.
4. For example, 39:38 [37]; 2:170 [175], *etc.*
5. ﴿وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ لاَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بالأَخِرَةِ عَنِ الصِّرَاطِ لَنَاكِبُونَ﴾(المؤمنون:74)

   Those who believe not in the Hereafter are deviating from the right way.
6. *'iwajan* for *mu'wajjatan*.
7. 'Abīd b. al-Abraṣ, *Dīwān* XIV, 2.
8. v. 19.
9. *Dīwān* XLI, vv. 12-13.
10. A very old borrowing from the Latin *strata* (i.e. *via strata*, 'paved way') meaning the so-called Roman road. The word appears in the *Dīwān* of 'Abid al-Abraṣ in the plural from *ṣurut* meaning just ordinary roads. The *Jāhilī* Arabs, in so far as we can judge from their literature, seem to have lost all memory of this etymology.
11. "The Worship consists of 'word' (*qawl*), 'deed' (*'amal*) and 'abstention' (*imsāk*). (viz. from the forbidden acts)" الصلاةُ قولٌ وعملٌ وإمساك al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah*, §357, p.121.
12. For such details, see E. E. Calverley, *Worship in Islam*, Madras, 1925.
13. *Dīwān*, p. 52, v. 2; p. 54, v. 2.
14. صَلّى على فُلان= دعا له بخير، باركه

9:85 [84]; 9:104 [103]; 33:42 [43] may be adduced as some of the Qur'anic examples.

15. Cf. *Lisān al-'Arab*, p. 242; *irtasama* means "to pray to God for protection", but according to Abū Ḥanīfah, the verb here means "to seal up the jar tightly".
16. *Dīwān*, p. 164, v. 16.
17. *Dīwān*, p. 171, v. 8.

CHAPTER 7

Communicative Relation Between God and Man: Linguistic Communication

I. God's Speech (*Kalām Allāh*)[1]

The communicative relation between God and man in the Qur'anic view is, to repeat what has been pointed out several times, basically twofold: (1) from God to man and (2) from man to God. In the previous chapter we have dealt with the non-verbal type. As I said there, the verbal type which is going to be the subject of the present chapter, is in the last analysis but a particular case of the more general phenomenon of God-man communication represented in a typical way by the non-verbal category. This being the case, what has been said about the fundamental structure of the non-verbal communication applies *in toto* to the verbal one, as far as concerns the God→man side of the matter. In other words, Revelation is nothing but a very particular case of the "sending down" of the *āyāt*. Only, Revelation stands out so clearly and distinctly from all other forms of "sending down" that it demands to be treated separately as an independent category. And this is also the Qur'anic view on this question. In the Qur'an, Revelaton is given a very special place. It is treated there as something extraordinary, something mysterious, the secret of which cannot be disclosed to the ordinary human mind. Hence the necessity of the intermediary called 'Prophet'. In this respect, the *āyāt* which God sends down in this special form are wholly different from all other *āyāt*, which are 'natural' and, therefore, accessible to any human being who is possessed of the normal capacity of 'right understanding'.

We may point out as one of the most characteristic and distinguishing marks of the three great religions of Semitic origin, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the view common to all of them that the very historical source, the ultimate guarantee, of the Truth of the religious experience of the believers lies in the initial fact of God's having revealed Himself to human beings. And Revelation means in Islam that God 'spoke', that He revealed Himself through language, and that not in some mysterious non-human language but in a clear humanly understandable language. This *is* the initial and the most decisive fact. Without this initial act on the part of God, there would have been no true religion on earth according to the Islamic understanding of the word religion.

It is no wonder, then, that Islam should have been from the very beginning extremely language conscious. Islam arose when God spoke. The whole Islamic culture made its start with the historic fact that man was addressed by God in a language which he himself spoke. This was not a simple matter of having "sent down" a sacred Book. It meant primarily that God 'spoke'. And this is precisely what 'Revelation' means. Revelation is essentially a linguistic concept.

Now Revelation in this sense has, within the Qur'anic contexts, two different, but equally important aspects. One of them concerns its being a 'speech' (*kalām*) concept, in the narrow technical sense of the term 'speech' as distinguished from 'language' (*lisān*). The other has to do with the fact that of all the cultural languages that were available at that time the Arabic language was chosen by God by design and not by accident—as the Qur'an emphasizes in several places—as the means of divine speech. Using the Saussurian terminology we may distinguish between these two aspects by saying that the former is the *parole*-side, while the latter is the *langue*-side of the problem, *kalām* and *lisān* in Arabic being roughly equivalent to the French *parole* and *langue* respectively. Both of these aspects will come to have grave cultural repercussions later in the history of Islamic thought, the significance of which will be made clear as we go on. Let us first concentrate our attention on the *parole*-aspect of Revelation.

We shall begin by remarking that Revelation, according to the Qur'anic conception of the phenomenon, is God's *parole*: Revelation (*wahy*)=God's speech (*kalām Allāh*). Far from being an arbitrary interpretation, this is actually the paraphrase which we meet with

frequently in the Qur'an. And, as will be easy to imagine, the fact is very significant in regard to the subject of this chapter. Just one or two examples from the Qur'an may suffice to make this point convincing. Thus in Sūrah al-Tawbah we read:

﴿وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ﴾

If anyone of the polytheists comes to you (O Muhammad) seeking thy protection as a client, make him thy client so that he may have the chance of hearing God's speech (kalām Allāh).

al-Tawbah, 9:6

Here it is contextually evident that "God's speech" refers to what God has spoken and said to the Prophet, *i.e.*, words revealed to him. Likewise in Sūrah al-Baqarah, in reference to the revelation of the Mosaic Law it is said:

﴿أَفَتَطْمَعُونَ أَن يُؤْمِنُوا لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُ مِن بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

Can you have any hope that they (i.e. the Jews) will submit to you when a party of them used to listen to God's speech (kalām Allāh), then changed it arbitrarily and consciously after they had understood it?

al-Baqarah, 2:70 [75]

The very possibility of turning 'Revelation' into a more analytic form of "God's speech" shows most clearly that this phenomenon has semantically two different points of emphasis: (1) God and (2) speech. In other words, the concept has two bases on which it stands.

When particular emphasis is put on the first basis, *i.e.*, God, and the whole phenomenon viewed from that side, the concept of Revelation is signified by a certain class of words that cannot properly be applied to any aspect of the ordinary and normal human speech behavior, like *tanzīl* (sending down), *wahy etc. Tanzīl* can never be used in reference to an occurrence of speech act between man and man. The 'basic' meaning of the word, in which, in this case, etymology makes itself felt with particular clearness, forbids it

to be applied except to supernatural communication. For the root from which the word is derived, *NZL*, means 'descending', and *tanzīl*, therefore, has the meaning of "causing (something) to go down". As regards *waḥy*, we may notice that it is sometimes used in reference to human communication, or indeed, for that matter, even to animal communication as often happens in pre-Islamic poetry, but even in such cases, the word can be used only when the communication in question, whether human or animal, occurs in an extraordinary situation, and it is always accompanied by a sense of secrecy and mysteriousness. This point will be examined later in more detail, when we come to the problem of the meaning structure of this important word in the Qur'an.

It suffices to remark at the moment that Revelation, when looked at from this angle, is not a speech act in the natural and ordinary sense of the word. And if we go a step further and place an absolute emphasis on this first basis of the concept, Revelation becomes a theological mystery incapable of being grasped by human analytic thought. The phenomenon of Revelation, in this respect, is something essentially mysterious, that does not allow of analysis; it is something only to be believed in.

We should not forget, however, that the concept of Revelation has another and equally important basis, which renders it capable of being analyzed in a normal way. Revelation, as I have suggested above, is semantically equal to "God's speech". If, instead of putting an exclusive emphasis on the first constituent, we view the matter from the angle of the second element, we realize at once that Revelation is, after all, a kind of 'speech'. Otherwise, the Qur'an would not have used the word *kalām* (speech) in describing Revelation.

It is difficult, then, to resist the conclusion that, although, in so far as it is *God*'s speech Revelation is something mysterious and has nothing in common with ordinary human linguistic behavior, in so far as it is *speech*, it must have all the essential attributes of human speech. In fact, the Qur'an uses also other words in reference to Revelation, that are most commonly applied to ordinary, commonplace products of speech: *kalimah* meaning 'word' for example, in Sūrah al-Shūrā:

﴿وَيَمْحُ اللَّهُ الْبَاطِلَ وَيُحِقُّ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ﴾

And God will wipe out the Falsehood and establish the Truth as Truth with his words.

al-Shūrā, 42:23 [24]

Qawl is another word of this kind; it is evidently of the commonest of all terms relating to the human speech behavior. *Qāla, i.e.* "someone said something", is one of the words that have most frequently been used in Arabic from the earliest time of its history until today. The word *qāla* is so commonplace that it needs almost no explanation. The word is there; and everybody understands its meaning. In connection with the topic under discussion, it is important to note that in the Qur'an God Himself often uses this word in reference to the content of His own Revelation.

Thus in Sūrah al-Muzammil, God, addressing Muḥammad, says:

﴿إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلاً ثَقِيلاً﴾

Verily, We are going to cast upon thee a weighty word!

al-Muzammil, 73:5

It should be noticed that here God refers to His own Revelation by means of a word which is the commonest of all words for human speech act, *qawl*, though, to be sure, it is qualified in this verse by a very strong adjective meaning 'weighty' or 'heavy' (*thaqīl*).

The conclusion to be drawn from this brief consideration is that, although revelation in itself is a phenomenon that goes beyond all comparison and defies all analysis, yet there is a certain respect in which we can approach it analytically and try to discover the basic structure of its concept by considering it an extreme, or rather, an exceptional case of the general linguistic behavior common to all beings that 'speak' at all.

What makes Revelation such a particular non-natural kind of linguistic phenomenon is that in it the speaker is God and the hearer is a man. This means that speech occurs here between the super-natural order of being and the real order of being, so that there is no ontological balance or equilibrium between speaker and hearer. In the normal give and take of words, both the speaker and the hearer exist on the same level of being, standing on the footing of ontological equality. A human being speaks to and is understood by another

human being. There can be no linguistic communication between a man and, say, a horse, except as a metaphor, because, between a man and an animal, however intelligent the latter may be, there is no equality in regard to the level of being. The utmost that can be produced between the two partners in such a case is a non-verbal or extra-linguistic exchange of signs. The poet 'Antarah offers an extremely interesting example regarding this problem.

In the well-known verses of his *Mu'allaqah*-Ode, he describes in a most touching and pathetic way his experience of such a non-verbal communication between himself and his horse. The intimate—almost personal, we should say—relation between the poet and the horse has been proverbial among the Arabs.

In these verses 'Antarah depicts the tragic death of his beloved horse on the battle-field. Already the horse is mantled in blood. With several spears stuck in the breast, the horse flinches and turns aside, being no longer able to spring forward toward the enemy. "Then he complained to me with gushing tears and sad whimpering. Had he but known what it was to exchange words, he would have described his pains, had he but known how to speak he would have spoken to me".[2]

A man and an animal cannot communicate with each other linguistically for two closely related reasons: (1) lack of a common sign-system between them and (2) essential difference of an ontological nature. Stated thus abstractly, the same thing is true of the theoretic impossibility of verbal communication between God and man, for here too there is no common sign-system between the two, and an essential ontological difference separates them from each other.

However, in the case of the Qur'anic Revelation, the first hindrance regarding a common sign-system was removed by the fact that the Arabic language was chosen by God Himself as the common sign-system between God and man. But the second, ontological, hindrance was not of such a nature that it could be removed so easily. Hence the extraordinariness of this phenomenon. For here genuine linguistic communication does occur between two levels of being that are worlds apart and between which lies an infinite distance of essential separation. And yet God speaks to man, and man hears the words and understands them. And that is Revelation. How should we account for this extraordinary phenomenon? Or rather,

how did the Arabs themselves of that age experience it and what kind of conception did they form for themselves of this strange happening? That will be our main concern in the first half of this chapter.

But before we begin to grapple with this difficult problem, we must try to analyze the original meaning of the word *wahy*, which is admittedly by far the most important of all words in Arabic denoting the phenomenon of Revelation.

II. The Original Meaning of the Word *Wahy*

Fortunately, the word *wahy* is one of those that are used repeatedly in pre-Islamic poetry, and this facilitates very much the analysis of the original, that is, pre-Qur'anic, structure of the concept. From various examples of its usage I would isolate as its essential semantic conditions the following three points.

1— It is 'communication', in the first place. In order to smooth the way for analysis, I would like to introduce at this point a new methodological concept: 'two-person-relation word', and begin by saying that 'communication' in general belongs semantically to the class of two-person-relation words. What does this mean? Let me first explain briefly what I mean by a 'two-person-relation word'. The conception, as we shall see presently, plays an exceedingly important role in the analysis of the semantic structure of Revelation.

In analysing word meanings in general, we find it often very useful to begin by paying attention to the 'number' of persons involved, the word 'person' in this context being taken in the sense of *dramatis personae*. In other words, it is often important for us to know, as a first step in semantical analysis, how many persons—actors—should be there on the stage in order that the event denoted by the word might actually occur. This is of course restricted only to those cases where the idea of 'person' is involved in the basic structure itself of the meaning. A table is there, for example, for people to sit at, and books are there for people to read, but the meaning structure of 'table' or 'book' does not contain the idea of 'person' as one of its primary and essential costituents.

What I mean by a 'two-person-relation word' will be best understood after these general remarks, if one compares with each other the two simple sentences "I eat" and "I blame". The verb in the

first sentence is a 'one-person-word' while the verb in the second sentence is a 'two-person-relation word'. I have chosen intentionally the verbs 'eat' and 'blame', both of which are so-called 'transitive' verbs, to show that the semantical distinction we are now talking about is something apparently similar to, but in reality quite different from, the grammatical distinction between the transitive and the intransitive.

Both 'eat' and 'blame' are transitive verbs, and yet the former is a 'one-person' word, while the second is a 'two-person' word. In the case of 'eating', only one person is required to be on the stage. Of course, there may be more than one person, but that is something quite accidental and of only secondary significance as far as the basic semantic structure of 'eating' is concerned. There is one actor on the stage; he eats, and this is all that is required in order that there may be an occurrence of the verb 'eat'.[3] This kind of words I would call 'one-person' words. In the case of the verb 'blame', on the contrary, there must be two persons on the stage. The act called 'blaming' cannot in the nature of the case actually occur unless there are at least two persons. If there is no one else, the actor blames himself, if he does blame at all. And this is also, structurally, a two-person-relation, the actor playing a double role.

Coming back to the word in question *waḥy*, we observe, in the explanation, that it is a two-person-relation term. There must be, in other words, two persons on the stage in order that the event which is called *waḥy* may actually take place. Let us call them *A* and *B*. In this process *A* acts actively (A→B), and the act itself is the transmission of *A*'s will by means of a sign or signs. And there can be here no reciprocity, that is to say, the relation, once established, cannot absolutely be reversed. It is strictly unilateral communication.

2— It is not necessarily verbal. That is to say, the signs used for the purpose of communication are not always linguistic, though words may also be used.

3— There is always a sense of mysteriousness, secrecy, and privacy. In other words, this type of communication is esoteric, so to speak. The communication is strictly a private matter between *A* and *B*. *A* makes himself perfectly clear to *B*, but to *B* only. There is a perfect communication between them, but it is made in such a way that the context of communication is difficult to understand for the outsiders.

With these three essential conditions in mind let us examine closely one interesting example, and see how *wahy* looks like when the conceptual structure just explained becomes materialized. The example is from one of the well-known odes of 'Alqamah al-Fahl, a first-rate poet of pre-Islamic times:[4]

يُوحِي إِلَيْهَا بِإِنْقَاضٍ وَنَقْنَقَةٍ كَمَا تَرَاطَنَ فِي أَفْدَانِهَا الرُّومُ

The poet is here describing, with a pleasant touch of humor coming from personification, the homecoming of a male ostrich. This male ostrich has got far away from home in search of food. Suddenly, on a rainy and windy day, he remembers "his wife and children"—*i.e.* the female ostrich and the eggs whom he has left at home. The rain somehow makes him feel anxious about them, and he begins to run as fast as he can toward his home. He comes back and there he finds his family safe and in peace. Relieved of his anxiety, he begins to talk to his wife delightfully. He is saying something to her. What is he saying? No one knows besides themselves: it is a secret between the two. This is the situation which the poet is trying to convey. He says:

> The male ostrich is talking to her (*yūḥī*, a verbal form corresponding to our *wahy*) with cracking sounds (*inqād*, which is the 'ostrich language') and with *naqnanah* (an onomatopoeic representation of the 'cracking of the ostrich'), just like the Greeks talk with each other in an incomprehensible language (*tarāṭanu)* in their castles.

The word *tarāṭanu* (for *tatarāṭanu*) in this context is very important for our purpose. The basic verb *raṭana*, of which *tatarāṭanu* is a derivative form, consists semantically of two fundamental elements. One is the idea of the speaker's being a foreigner, that is, a non-Arab, whose mother-tongue is some non-Arabic language. And the second is that it is completely incomprehensible to an Arab hearer. The derivative form *tarāṭana* turns the combination of these two elements into a 'two-person-relation', with an additional idea of reciprocation so that it produces in our minds the image of foreigners talking with each other in some incomprehensible language. Whenever such a thing happened among the Arabs, quite naturally they got very suspicious. In the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal, one of the canonical collections of the *Ḥadīths*, for example, it is related that a young Greek was once seen talking to a Greek

woman married to an Arab "in their own incomprehensible language",[5] and that this was immediately taken as conclusive evidence that there was a secret and illicit relationship between the two.

In the light of this information, the second half of this verse would seem to give an important clue as to how we should understand the key-word in the first half, *yūḥī*, that, in short, *waḥy*. Suppose two persons are talking with each other in your presence with an air of intimacy in a foreign language which you do not understand. You are sure that between the two persons there is perfect communication of ideas and sentiments going on, but you cannot penetrate into the content itself of the communication, because you are an outsider. You are completely shut out from their intimacy. And this naturally arouses the sense of of witnessing something mysterious.

That the semantic structure of the word *waḥy* contains an element of mysteriousness coming from incomprehensibility may be shown by another fact. In pre-Islamic poetry the word *waḥy* is very often used to mean 'writing', 'letters' or 'characters'. Thus Labīd in his *Mu'allaqah*-Ode, speaking of the remains of the old abode of his beloved, long deserted by the inhabitants, says that its trace has not yet been completely erased; it still remains "like characters" (*wūḥiyy*, pl. of *waḥy*).[6]

Likewise al-Marrār b. Munquidh, a poet of the first century of Islam:

وَتَرَى مِنْهَا رُسُوماً قَدْ عَفَتْ مِثْلَ خَطِّ اللاَّمِ فِي وَحْيِ الزُّبُرْ

Now you see only some faint traces (of the old abode) just like the letter *L* in the writing of books.[7]

The Arabic lexicons usually give two different meanings to this word *waḥy*: (1) revelation and (2) letters, as if there were no connection at all between the two. This view overlooks the very important fact that for the pre-Islamic Arabs, who were mostly completely illiterate, letters were something mysterious. We know how they were struck with astonishment by the strange—so they felt—South Arabian characters engraved on the rocks. It was the time when the word *qalam* (pen) still carried unusually grave and deep

implications as is shown by the fact that the word occurs in one of the oath-formulas which characterize the earliest Sūrahs of the Qur'an.

﴿وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ﴾

By the Pen, and what they inscribe (therewith)?[8]

Al-Qalam, 68:1

Again, in another important passage, the same word appears assuming symbolic meaning:

﴿اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ، عَلَّمَ الإِنسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ﴾

Recite: And the Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught man that which he did not know (before).

Al-'Alaq, 96:4-5

The written letters were signs of something, all Arabs knew it very well. The written letters were there to convey some meaning, but most of the pre-Islamic Arabs did not know what those signs conveyed. They were to their minds something mysterious. 'Communication' coupled with the sense of 'mysteriousness'—this was the connotation of writing at that time. Thus understood, the two allegedly different meanings of the word *wahy* are, far from being different from each other, just one and the same thing.

In regard to this idea of mysterious way of communication conveyed by the word *wahy*, attention may be drawn to the existence of a very interesting example in the Qur'an. To be more strict, it is not so much a 'mysterious' as 'non-natural' way of communication. Still, in any case, the basic idea is the same.

In the Sūrah Maryam, Zakariyyā is made dumb and speechless for three days as a sign (*āyah*) of God's special favor. There we read:

﴿فَخَرَجَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنَ الْمِحْرَابِ فَأَوْحَى إِلَيْهِمْ أَن سَبِّحُوا بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا﴾

Then he came out unto his people from the sanctuary and signified (awhā, the same word as yūhi—wahy) to them: Glorify

(your Lord) morning and evening.

Maryam, 19:12 [11]

Under ordinary natural conditions the Qur'an might have used the word *qāla* ("he said") or *amara* ("he ordered"). But Zakariyyā is temporarily dumb; he cannot say anything. So he makes a signal to his people, not by words but by gesture. The purpose of communicating ideas is achieved here in an unusual a way. This is what is implied by the word *waḥy* in this passage.

The example is interesting because it is an extremely rare case in which both *A* and *B* who are involved in the two-person-relation of *waḥy* are human beings. Normally in the Qur'an, only one of the two persons, *B*, who receives the communication is a human being. *A* is God Himself. For example:

﴿وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى مُوسَى أَنْ أَلْقِ عَصَاكَ﴾

And We—the speaker is God—signified (awḥaynā, from waḥy) to Moses. Throw down your stick!

Al-A'rāf, 7:114 [117]

Similar examples abound in the Qur'an. It is important to remark that the *waḥy* at this stage is not yet 'Revelation' in the proper, technical sense of the word. At this stage the word *waḥy* is a synonym of *ilhām*, (of a more general, non-verbal nature). The usage of the word *waḥy* in this sense would suggest that God communicates His Will to a human being directly, putting no intermediary between them ($A \rightarrow B$); only, this is done without any linguistic formulation of the thought. God, in this case, works upon.the human mind in such a way that the latter understands the will of God immediately. 'Revelation' in the proper, Qur'anic sense, is, besides being a verbal process, something more than a simple two-person relation; it is a three-person-relation, or even a four-person-relation. This we shall see presently.

But before turning to this problem, it may be well to notice, in connection with the question of the direct two-person communication between God and man, that in the Qur'an Moses occupies a very unusual position. It would seem that of all the Prophets recognized as such in the Qur'an Moses is allowed to enjoy a special privilege

in this respect. Quite exceptionally, God even "speaks" to Moses directly—the word used being *kallama*. This word is a transitive verbal form of *kalām*, 'speech' (*parole*) to which reference was made at the beginning of this chapter, and implies definitely a two-personal verbal relation between *A* and *B*.

For instance, in the Sūrah al-A'rāf,[9] Moses goes up, alone, the Mount Sinai to meet God—one of the well-known Biblical scenes. There "the Lord spoke to Moses (*kallama-hu*)" in complete seclusion from all other human beings. And in the Surah al-Nisā', we read:

﴿وَرُسُلاً قَدْ قَصَصْنَاهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِن قَبْلُ وَرُسُلاً لَّمْ نَقْصُصْهُمْ عَلَيْكَ وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا﴾

And Apostles of whom We have told thee before and Apostles We have not yet told thee. And unto Moses God spoke directly (kallama taklīman).

Al-Nisā', 4:162 [164]

In another passage, the same Sinai scene is described in a different way that is, in terms of different concepts:

﴿وَنَادَيْنَاهُ مِن جَانِبِ الطُّورِ الأَيْمَنِ وَقَرَّبْنَاهُ نَجِيًّا﴾

And We—the speaker is God—called to him from the right side of mount (Sinai) and let him come near in order to have a personal talk with Him.

Maryam, 19:52 [53]

The verse here quoted is remarkable in that it uses two interesting linguistic concepts which, if interpreted rightly, would provide a clue to a very important aspect of the phenomenon of *waḥy*. The two concepts of which I am now talking are *nādā* and *najīy*.

The verb *nādā* is in meaning roughly the same as *kallama*, the only difference being that the concept signified by the former is specially conditioned in terms of the space relation between *A* and *B*: it means, *A* speaks to *B*, *A* being in a far-off place. It means "to talk to somebody from afar"; there is always the element of a long distance involved between *A* and *B* in this concept. In this sense, it is the contrary of *waswasa* ("to whisper into another's ear") which we shall discuss later. *Waswasa* implies the shortest possible distance between

A and *B*. "Long distance between *A* and *B* naturally necessitates that *A* should speak in a loud voice, while in the case of *waswasa*, *A* speaks to *B* in a low muffled voice.

Examples of *nādā* abound in pre-Islamic poetry. Here I give one of them which seems to make the basic structure of the concept particularly clear.

إِذَا مَا اقْتَنَصْنَا لَمْ نُخَاتِلْ بِجُنَّةٍ وَلَكِنْ نُنَادِي مِنْ بَعِيدٍ أَلاَ ارْكَبِ

When we go out hunting, we never try to deceive (animals) by wearing camouflage (*i.e.* the running-down of the quarry is so certain). On the contrary, we cry out from afar: Get on your horse![10]

As regards the second word *najīy* we must notice, first of all, that it refers the particular status of *B* in the $A \rightarrow B$ relation of linguistic communication. It means *B* as a person standing in a particularly intimate personal relationship with the speaker *A*. It is the 'confidant', to whom *A* can safely confide all his secrets and completely unbosom himself. This kind of confidential talk is called in Arabic *munājāt*, which is derived from the same root as *najīy*. This is also specially conditioned in terms of the distance between *A* and *B*; the use of the word usually suggests that the speaker and the hearer stand very close to each other—hence *qarrabnā* ("We let him come near") in the Qur'anic text just quoted.

All this would seem to suggest that Moses in this respect was given a very special divine favor. The Qur'an itself emphasizes very much this fact, as is evident from the Surah al-Baqarah, where we read:

﴿تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ مِّنْهُم مَّن كَلَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٍ﴾

Those Apostles, some of them We have caused to excel others. Among them there is one to whom God Himself spoke (man kallama Allāhu), and some there are whom He has raised in rank.

Al-Baqarah, 2:254 [253]

It is in this sense that the later theologians called Moses *kalīm Allāh*, meaning thereby a man upon whom God bestowed a special

favor by speaking to him directly.

It will be worth remarking further that in this two-person ($A \rightleftharpoons B$) relation, if *A* happens to be not God but *Shaytān* (Satan or Demon), then the communication is not usually called *wahy*, but *waswasah*[11] (whispering). But structurally these two are not entirely different from each other. Besides the difference in regard to the 'distance' between *A* and *B*, which we have seen above, the only main difference between them lies in the 'source' of natural communication: in one case it comes from God, while in the other it is *Shaytān* who happens to be the source of inspiration. Semantically, *waswasah* is contained as a small sector within the larger field of *wahy*. This is shown by the fact that the Qur'an uses sometimes the verb *awhā* (*wahy*) exactly in the particular sense of *waswasah*.

﴿وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوًّا شَيَاطِينَ الْإِنسِ وَالْجِنِّ يُوحِي بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ زُخْرُفَ الْقَوْلِ غُرُورًا﴾

Likewise We have appointed to each one of the Prophets an enemy—Demons, whether of humankind or jinn, who inspire (yūḥī) in one another words adorned with false embellishments, beguiling one another.

Al-An'ām, 6:112 [113]

﴿وَإِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ لَيُوحُونَ إِلَىٰ أَوْلِيَائِهِمْ لِيُجَادِلُوكُمْ﴾

Verily, the Demons are inspiring (yūḥūna) their companions (i.e. Kāfirs) to dispute with you (i.e. Muslims).

Al-An'ām, 6:121

Coming back to the word *waswasah*, it is worth noticing that, in the Qur'anic conception, the human soul itself plays sometimes the role of the *Shaytān*, as we see from the Surah Qāf, where we read:

﴿وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ﴾

We created man, and We know what his soul whispers (tuwaswisu, from waswasah) to him.

Qāf, 50:15 [16]

Usually in cases like this, the word connotes something mysterious, said in a low, whispering tone, which deranges and agitates the mind and puts into it an alluring temptation. Al-A'shā al-Akbar[12] uses the word in describing the clattering sound of bracelets and ankle-rings as the beautiful girl Hurayrah walks away gracefully, which entices him and stirs up in his heart an irresistible passion:

تَسْمَعُ لِلْحَلْيِ وَسْوَاساً إِذَا انْصَرَفَتْ كَمَا اسْتَعَانَ بِرِيحٍ عِشْرِقٌ زَجِلُ

You hear the tempting sound (*waswās*) of her ornaments as she walks away, a sound just like a rustling *'ishriq*-tree when the wind blows through its (leaves) [*lit.* when it (*i.e.* the tree) seeks help from a wind].

Interestingly enough this verse of the great poet seems to respond to a Qur'anic verse, in which the pious Muslim women are admonished not to do anything that is likely to provoke men's lust.

﴿وَلاَ يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِن زِينَتِهِنَّ﴾

Let them not stamp their feet so as to be known (i.e. so as to disclose) the ornaments (i.e. the ankle-rings) which they hide.
Al-Nūr, 24:31

This is a very well-known verse and is often quoted in Islam as a ground for prohibiting dancing. The commentator al-Baydāwī says that the clattering (*taqa'qu'*) of ankle-rings is likely to excite lust in men.

Thus understood, the Qur'anic verse throws an illuminating light on A'shā's description of Hurayrah, and consequently, on the very nature of the concept of *waswasah.*

III. The Semantical Structure of Revelation

I turn now to the Qur'anic concept of Revelation (*wahy*) in the proper technical sense, with a view to analysing it from the semantical point of view. This will be done by isolating one by one all the essential conditions under which the word standing for that concept is naturally and properly elicited.[13]

To put it in a more plain language: When and in what kind of

concrete situation is the word *waḥy* actually used in the Qur'an? What are the strictly necessary conditions which, when fulfilled, will enable one to use this word properly? To give a detailed analytic answer to this basic question will be the main task of this section.

The first essential condition is the most general one. Revelation is a concrete speech behavior (*kalām*) which corresponds to *la parole* in the terminology of modern linguistics. The *parole* is, in Saussurian terminology, linguistic communication which takes place in a concrete situation between two persons, one of whom plays an active role, and the other a passive role ($A \rightarrow B$). And this is exactly what is meant by the Arabic word *kalām*. In this respect *waḥy* is a partial and more particular concept falling under the general concept of *kalām*. And this implies that all the semantical conditions of the word *waḥy*, which it will be our task to isolate, should be such as bring out the specific characteristics of *waḥy* which contribute towards making it a particular concept within the wider field of *kalām*.

Now in regard to this first condition, there are two important points to note; namely, first, that it is essential to any act of speech, that is, *parole* qua *parole*, that both *A* and *B* should resort to one and the same system of signs, which is, as we saw earlier, nothing other than what is called today in French *langue* corresponding to the Arabic *lisān*. In other words, in order that there might be an effective linguistic communication, *A* should speak the language which is comprehensible to *B*. In normal cases both *A* and *B* belong to one and the same language community. Otherwise, *A* should speak the language of *B*, or at least he should use some foreign language which happens to be comprehensible to both of them. In the Qur'anic Revelation, God (*A*) talks Muḥammad (*B*) in *B*'s language, that is Arabic. The problems relating to the use of Arabic as the language of Revelation in Islam will be dealt with more fully in section IV.

The second point is that it is essential that *A* and *B* should stand on the same level of being, that they should belong to the same category of being. In the case of Revelation—and here begins the real characteristic of the concept of Revelation—this basic rule is violated. For *A* and *B*, *i.e.*, God and man, are quite different from each other with regard to the order of being. Here most evidently *A* and *B* do not stand horizontally on the same level of being. The relation is vertical: *A* stands above, representing the highest level of being, and *B* stands below, representing a far lower level of being.

This ontological situation plays an exceedingly important part in the structure of the Qur'anic concept of Revelation. Let us, then, isolate this as the second essential condition of this concept and direct our attention to the special problems which it raises semantically. As I have said above, no linguistic communication can occur between *A* and *B* when there is this kind of ontological discrepancy between the two. In order that real linguistic communication might occur in spite of this basic rule of language, something extraordinary must happen to either *A* or *B*.

This point has been clearly grasped by some Muslim thinkers. Al-Kirmānī for instance, in his famous commentary on al-Bukkārī's Hadīth-Collection says:[14] Revelation consists in verbal communication between God and man. But theoretically no exchange of words (*al-taḥāwur*), nor teaching (*ta'līm*), nor learning (*ta'allum*) is possible unless there is realized between the two parties a certain kind of equality, *i.e.*, the relation (*munāsabah*) of the speaker (*al-qā'il*) and the hearer (*al-sāmi'*).

How, then, is such an extraordinary relation realizable between God and man? There are, al-Kirmānī replies, two possible ways: either the hearer (*B*) should undergo a deep personal transformation under the overwhelming influence of the spiritual force of the speaker (*A*), or the speaker should come down and assume somehow the attribute of the hearer.

And he adds that both cases actually occurred with Muḥammad. The auditory type of Revelation in which, as we see in the *Hadīth*, Muḥammad is reported to have heard some strange noise like the ringing of a bell or the humming of bees, exemplifies the first category. While the visionary type of Revelation, equally mentioned in the *Hadīth* and the Qur'an, in which he is related to have seen the heavenly Messenger or Angel, belongs to the second category.

Opinions may differ on this last point. But in any case we must acknowldge that al-Kirmānī saw quite rightly the fundamental nature of speech, and that also he tried to interpret the fact of Revelation in terms of this basic principle.

However this may be, it is certain that the particular kind of *munāsabah* (relation) of which al-Kirmānī speaks can be established between a supernatural being and a man, if it is possible at all, only by a drastic transformation, a naturalization, we might say, of the personality of the man. Here something beyond his power, something

against his nature comes to pass forcibly in himself. This causes him most naturally the keenest pain and torture, not only mental but also even physical. This happened to Muhammad in various forms. *Ḥadīths* tell us of his intense sufferings, physical pains, the feeling of being choked at those moments. 'Ā'ishah relates—and this is one of the most famous authentic *Hadīths* about Revelation—"I saw him as Revelation came down upon him on an extremely cold day. His forehead was running with beads of perspiration". Other *Ḥadīths* report that when the Revelation came, his face darkened; sometimes he fell to the ground as if intoxicated or swooning; sometimes he groaned like a camel-calf *etc.*

Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddimah* explains this phenomenon in this way. This physical pain, he says, is due to the fact that in this supernatural experience, the human soul which is not by nature prepared to experience such a thing, is forced to leave momentarily its humanity (*al-bashariyyah*, 'human-ness') and exchanges it for angelicality (*al-malakiyyah*, 'angel-ness'), and becomes actually for the time being part of the angelic world until it resumes its human-ness.[15]

But this is of course a theoretic or philosophical explanation of the phenomenon. This was not certainly the way the Arabs in Muhammad's time approached the problem. Indeed the pagan Arabs had ready at hand a very convincing—of course to their minds—way of interpreting this kind of phenomena.

We must keep in mind in this connection that we are as yet only at the second stage of our analysis. All we have established so far is that we have here a case of verbal communication coming from a supernatural being to a human being. Properly speaking, the problem of Who or What this supernatural being might be is not yet solved.

Now, if we stop at this stage—and the pagan Arabs did stop at the stage and obstinately refused to go any further—and look at the matter from the *Jāhilī* point of view, then the whole thing would appear to be just the very familiar phenomenon of possession (*tajnīn*), which is, in no way peculiar to the Arabs or the Semites, but something of the widest occurrence throughout the world and generally known in modern times under the name of shamanism. Some invisible supernatural being, whether a spirit or divinity, suddenly possesses an ecstatic person momentarily, and utters through him impassioned words, mostly in verse, which the man could never

compose by himself in ordinary, *i.e.* non-ecstatic, moments.

This phenomenon was extremely familiar to the pre-Islamic Arabs. For the *kāhin* (soothsayer) was exactly this type of man who was able to be possessed at any moment by a supernatural force. And this was the sole form of verbal inspiration known to the pagan Arabs. The 'poet' (*shā'ir*) also was, originally, this type of man.

Let us first examine the concept of 'poet' in ancient Arabia as an 'inspired' man. In doing this we must bear in mind the very important fact that the pre-Islamic poetry which has been preserved and handed down to us is mostly the product of the latter *Jāhilī* period, when the Arabic poetry had already passed long ago the cruder stage of primitive shamanism. By the time Islam appeared the poetry had already been elaborated and refined to a very great extent into art, almost in the sense in which we usually understand the word today. The famous pre-Islamic poets, like Imr' al-Qays, Tarafah and others were no longer shamans; they were rather real artists.

And yet in their work there are some sporadic remains of the ideas belonging to the older stage, and particularly there is a branch of poetry called *al-hijā'*—a kind of satirical poetry, which is based precisely on this primitive idea of word-magic.[16]

This *hijā'*-poetry, as was shown admirably well by Goldziher's now classical work on this branch of Arabian poetry,[17] preserved even right into the Umayyad period the pre-historic shamanistic conception of poetry. Besides, we have also a huge amount of old oral traditions preserved in various books, which provide with valuable material for studying the Arab conception of the poet and poetry in the earliest, unrecorded times.

What was poetry and what kind of man was a poet in the original form in Arabia? To make a long story short, the poet, as his very name *shā'ir*—it is a derivation from the verb *sha'ara*, or *sha'ura* meaning "to have cognizance of", *i.e.*, in this case, of something to which ordinary people have no access—implies, was a person who had the first-hand knowledge of the unseen world. And this knowledge of the unseen world he was supposed to derive, not from his own personal observation, but from constant intimate commerce with some supernatural beings, called *Jinn*. Thus poetry at this stage was not so much an 'art' as supernatural 'knowledge' derived from direct communication with the unseen spirits who were believed to be hovering around in the air.

The *Jinn* did not communicate with everybody. Each had a special choice. When a *Jinn* found a man of his or her liking, he or she pounced upon him, threw him down to the ground, kneeled upon his chest, and forced him to become his mouthpiece in this world. This was the initiation ceremony of poetry. The man, from that time on, was known as a 'poet', in the full sense of the word. And there was established between the poet and the *Jinn* a particular kind of extremely intimate personal relationship. Each individual poet used to have his own *Jinn* who came down upon him from time to time to give inspiration. The poet usually called his *Jinn* his "familiar friend" (*khalīl*). Not only that; the *Jinn* who came into such an intimate relationship with a particular poet was even known by a proper name somewhat like John or Mary. For instance the *Jinn* of one of the greatest pre-Islamic poets al-A'shā al-Akbar had the personal name *Mishal*, the original meaning of which is "carving knife"—a name symbolic of his glib, eloquent tongue. This *Jinn* Mishal appears only in his poetry.

Here I will give only one example,[18] which is particularly significant in connection with our present topic.

وَمَا كُنْتُ شَاعِرْداً وَلَكِنْ حَسِبْتَنِي إِذَا مِسْحَلٌ سَدَّى لِيَ الْقَوْلَ أَنْطِقُ

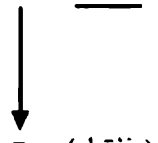
شَرِيكَان فِيمَا بَيْنَنَا مِنْ هَوَادَةٍ صَفِيَّان جِنِّيٌّ وَإِنْسٌ مُوَفَّقُ

يَقُولُ فَلاَ أَعْيَى لِشَيْءٍ أَقُولُهُ كَفَانِيَ لاَ عَيٌّ وَلاَ هُوَ أَخْرَقُ

The situation is somewhat like this. The poet is being attacked by an enemy poet. He must make a counterattack: otherwise he would not only lose face personally, but he would let his whole tribe suffer a defeat according the basic belief of the age. He feels irritated, impatient and uneasy, and somehow he cannot utter a word. As an excuse he describes his strange relationship with his *Jinn*, and says that he remains dumb and speechless in the face of his enemy, not because he is incompetent or ignorant but simply and solely because his *Jinn* does not yet give him words.

He says: "I am not an inexperienced debutant,[19] in the art of poetry but my situation is like this: whenever Mishal bestows upon

me the word I begin to be able to speak. Between us we are two intimate sincere friends; a *Jinn* and a human being who is naturally fit to him. If he only speaks (*i.e.* if he inspires me), then I will no longer be incapable of saying anything I would say. He suffices me so long as he is neither a tongue-tied one nor an awkward stupid fellow".



It is important to note in this connection that this kind of demonic inspiration was always felt by the poet to be something "coming down" from above *i.e.*, from the air. And for this aspect of poetic inspiration, the word *nuzūl* (verb *nazala,* to come down") was most generally used.[20] Thus, for example, Hassan Ibn Thābit[21] describes his own poetic experience in this way:

وَقَافِيَةٍ عَجَّتْ بِلَيْلٍ رَزِينَةٍ تَلَقَّيْتُ مِنْ جَوِّ السَّمَاءِ نُزُولَهَا

> Oft did a grave and heavy verse [the word *qāfiyah* does not mean, in a context like this, simply 'rhyme' or 'rhyme word' as it does in later Arabic, but it rather means words endued with a magical power by their being uttered in poetic form—a sort of incantation, like the word *carmen* in Old Latin] resound at night; oft did I receive it as it came down [lit: its coming down *nuzūl*] from mid-air.

To this we must add another important point, namely, that in the most ancient days of Arab heathenism known to us the position of the poet in the society was extremely high. A real poet was an inestimable tribal asset in peace as in war. In time of peace he was the leader of the nomad tribe, because of the supernatural knowledge he got from his *Jinn*. The wanderings of the tribe in the desert were regulated by instructions given by the chief shaman-poet of the tribe. In this sense, in the majority of cases *shā'ir* was almost synonymous with *qā'id* (tribal leader). In war time he was considered to be even more powerful than a warrior because he had the supernatural power of disarming the enemy, even before the actual battle began, by curses and spells which he launched against the enemy in verse-form, and which, were believed to have far more terrible effects in bringing destruction and shame upon their target than arrows and spears. Such was the pre-Islamic conception of the poet although in the latter *Jāhilī* period just preceding the rise of Islam, the social position of

the poet was no longer so high.

This makes us understand why the Prophet Muhammad was so often regarded by his contemporaries as a "poet inspired by a *Jinn*" (*shā'ir majnūn*), as we know from the Qur'an itself.[22] The pagan Arabs stubbornly refused to see anything in Muhammad which would distinguish him from a person possessed and inspired by a *Jinn*. In their eyes, here was a man who claimed to have a knowledge of the 'Unseen' (*al-ghayb*), brought to him by a supernatural being coming down from heaven (*nuzūl*). Whether that supernatural being be God, an Angel or a *Shaytān*, there was no essential distinction at all in their conception; all were *Jinn*.

The Qur'an tells us that the pagan Arabs could hardly differentiate Allah from the *Jinn*. For instance, in the Sūrah al-Saffāt we read:

﴿وَجَعَلُوا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ الْجِنَّةِ نَسَبًا﴾

They set up between Allah and the Jinn a kinship.

Al-Sāffāt, 37:158

In other words, in their conception both Allah and the *Jinn* belong in one and the same family.

Moreover, this man, Muhammad, showed in moments of prophetic inspiration evident signs of intense physical pain and mental sufferings. So here was, they thought, another *shā'ir*—a man possessed by a *Jinn*;[23] this was their natural immediate conclusion.

That such was the most prevalent and most widespread view among the pagan Arabs the Qur'an gives ample evidence. The very fact that the Qur'an stresses constantly that the Prophet Muhammad has nothing at all to do with demoniac possession, that he is *not* a man "possessed by a *Jinn*" is in itself the strongest evidence that such was the actual situation at Makkah.

Turning now to the Qur'anic view of the matter, we may observe that, from the standpoint of the Qur'an, the pagan Arabs who took Muhammad for a 'poet' committed a double mistake: first, by confusing the Almighty God with an inferior being, *Jinn*, and secondly by confusing a Prophet with a poet possessed by a *Jinn*.

According to the Qur'anic view, the real source of Prophetic inspiration (*A*) is not a *Jinn* but Allah. And there is between these

two an absolute reference, for Allah is the Creator of the whole world, while the *Jinn* are merely created beings;[24] and they, just like ordinary human beings, will be brought forth before God on the Day of Judgment to be judged,[25] and Hell will be filled both with men and *Jinn*.

In the second place, there is also an essential and absolute difference between a Prophet and a poet. A poet is by nature an *affāk*:[26] what he says is sheer *ifk*, a word which does not necessarily mean a 'lie', but something which has no basis of *haqq* (reality) or 'truth', something that is not based on *haqq*. An *affāk* is a man who utters quite irresponsibly whatever he likes to say without stopping to reflect whether his own words have some real basis or not, while what a Prophet says is Truth, absolute *haqq* and nothing else.[27] So that the $A \rightarrow B$ relation of prophetism, although it bears an outward and formal blance to the $A \rightarrow B$ relation of shamanism, has an essentially different structure from the latter.

The word *majnūn* (possessed) among the Arabs of that age was applied to still another type of man: *kāhin* to which reference was made earlier. We must now turn to this second concept.

Kāhin (soothsayer) was also a man possessed by *Jinn*, who uttered non-natural words under demoniac inspiration. *Kāhin* had much in common with *shā'ir*. Indeed, the more we go back to the ancient times the more difficult does it become to distinguish one from the other. After all, both were manifestations of shamanism, and in origin they must have been one and the same thing both in their nature and in their social function. And yet historically, there seems to have been some important points of difference.

Kāhin, in *Jāhiliyyah*, was a man with occult powers, who exercised those powers as a profession, and received freely honorarium for his services, called *ḥulwān*. At least in the latter *Jāhilī* age as we know it from the old traditions, the *kāhin*-ship was almost a social institution. He was interrogated on all important tribal and inter-tribal problems. He acted as an interpreter of dreams, he was asked to find lost camels; he served the tribesmen not only as a medical doctor but also as a detective in matters concerning crimes committed in society.

However, far more important from a linguist's point of view, was a stylistic feature which distinguished a *kāhin* from a *shā'ir*. The *kāhin* always gave his utterences in a particular rhythmic form known

as *saj'*. Opinion is divided as to whether this was the earliest form of poetry among the Arabs. Most probably it represents the pre-poetic form of expression: it is a form of expression which lies between regular poetry and the prose of ordinary daily conversation. Real Arabic poetry begins with *rajaz*, and *saj'* is a stage just preceding it.

Saj' consists in a sequence of short pregnant sentences, usually with a single rhyme. And this was the most typical style of inspiration and revelation in ancient Arabia. All speech-act that had its origin in the unseen powers, all speech-act that was not a daily mundane use of words, but had something to with the unseen powers, such as cursing, blessing, divination, incantation, inspiration, and revelation, had to be couched in this form.

The word itself *saj'* (corresponding to Hebrew *shag'*) etymologically and originally meant the cooing of pigeons and doves. And it was associated with the purring sound of the *Jinn's* voice. The Prophet Muḥammad himself, in a *Ḥadīth* going back to 'Ā'ishah, describes the impression produced by the *kāhin's* utterance as the clucking of a hen:[28] "He (the *Jinn*) clucks (*yuqarqiru*) into the ear of his companion like the clucking (*qarqarah*) of a hen".

As an example of this style, I will give here the very well-known prophecy uttered by a famous *kāhin Satīḥ*, of whom it is said that in moments of demoniac seizure he folded himself up like a garment so that his whole body appeared to be boneless except his skull.[29]

رَأَيْتُ حُمَمَهْ، You see a black charcoal

خَرَجَتْ مِنْ ظُلَمَهْ coming forth from the darkness of night

فَوَقَعَتْ بِأَرْضِ تُهَمَهْ، And it alights on a land sloping towards the sea

فَأَكَلَتْ مِنْهَا كُلَّ جُمْجُمَهْ And devours everything that has a skull

This piece of *saj'* is said to have meant the impending invasion and conquest of Yemen by the Ethiopians. When pressed by the king of Yemen as to whether this prophecy was true, the same soothsayer is related to have uttered the following words, also in *saj'* form.

وَالشَّفَقِ، By the evening twilight

وَاللَّيْلِ وَمَا وَسَقَ، By the darkness

وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ، By the dawn

لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَنْ طَبَقٍ When it breaks bright[30]

إِنَّ مَا أُنْبِئْتُكَ بِهِ لَحَقٌّ Verily what I have told you is truth

This one example will make it sufficiently clear that the *saj'*, as regards its form, was a kind of rhymed prose very close to real poetry by the repetition of rhyme, but different from poetry in not having meter in the sense of measures syllables. We may notice also that the *saj'* style of the *kāhin* was characteristically marked by strange oath-formulas, conjurations of nature, of which the second piece gives us some examples.

Both of these features, *i.e.*, the repetition of rhyme which gives often the sense of haunting beauty, and the conjurations of nature are characteristic of the early Sūrahs of the Qur'an. Is, then, the Qur'anic style fundamentally *saj'*? In some passages the Qur'anic style seems to satisfy in every respect the basic formal norms of *saj'*, while in others particularly in the later Sūrahs the usage of rhyme words deviates so far from the standard norm of *saj'* that we can hardly recognize there the ordinary *saj'*-form. But what is far more important from the Qur'anic point of view is the content itself of the message conveyed, and not the form of expression which conveys the message.

However, the pagan Arabs contemporary of Muḥammad did not look at the matter in this way. Instead, most of them stuck to the stylistic point of view, and took Muḥammad for a *kāhin* simply because of the formal, stylistic characteristics. The Qur'an of course denies emphatically the Prophet's being a *kāhin*:

﴿فَذَكِّرْ فَمَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَتِ رَبِّكَ بِكَاهِنٍ وَلَا مَجْنُونٍ﴾

By the grace of thy Lord thou (Muḥammad) art neither a soothsayer nor man possessed by a Jinn!

Al-Ṭūr, 52:29[31]

We are now in a position to examine from our particular point of view the third—and the most important—feature which characterizes the structure of the Qur'anic concept of Revelation. In the Qur'an, Revelation as a supernatural linguistic event is a three-person-relation concept, which makes it structurally something entirely different, not only from ordinary human speech, but also from all other types of verbal inspiration having *Jinn* as its source.

We must begin by calling to mind that both in the case of *shā'ir* and that of *kāhin*, the $A \rightarrow B$ relation is essentially a two-person-relation. *A*, i.e., a *Jinn* establishes a close personal relationship with *B*, *i.e.*, a human being: so close is this personal relationship that the *Jinn* who possesses the man speaks through the latter. There is no intermediary between them. We might even say that in moments of demoniac seizure, the *Jinn* and the man are completely united into one person. And this is the phenomenon which we generally know under the name of shamanism.

This does not apply to the Qur'anic conception of Revelation which is, as I have just said, a three-person-relation. There was, in other words, in Muḥammad's prophetic consciousness always somebody, some mysterious being between God and himself, who brought down Divine Words to his heart. So that the basic structure of Revelation in the sense in which the Qur'an understands it is like this:

$A \rightarrow M \rightarrow B$

We have to go on to examine this structure further in detail. According to the Qur'an itself, there are only three possible types of verbal communication from God to man. The three types are clearly stated and distinguished from each other in the Surah al-Shūrā, where we read:

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَن يُكَلِّمَهُ اللَّهُ إِلاَّ وَحْيًا أَوْ مِن وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ
أَوْ يُرْسِلَ رَسُولاً فَيُوحِيَ بِإِذْنِهِ مَا يَشَاءُ﴾

It is not for any man that God should speak to him except by wahy, or from behind the veil (min warā'i ḥijābin) or by God's sending a messenger (rasūlan) to communicate (yūḥiya) by His leave what He wills.

Al-Shūrā, 42:50-51 [51]

So the three different manners of Revelation are: (1) mysterious communication, (2) speaking from behind the veil, and (3) the sending of a messenger.

The first type is not elucidated in this verse, and, strictly speaking, we are left in the dark as to what is meant in concrete terms. But the word *waḥy* would seem to suggest that the reference is to that sort of direct communication which, as noted above, was a special divine favor bestowed upon Moses to the exclusion of all other Prophets.

As to the second type, the expression used—"from behind the veil"—suggests that there does occur a verbal communication (not a simple 'inspiration' or *ilhām*); only the hearer in this case does not have any vision of the speaker himself. But, although nothing is visible to his eyes, the Prophet has the clearer consciousness of there being somewhere in close vicinity a mysterious being who speaks to him in an extremely strange way. I think we can supplement our knowledge about this phenomenon by some important informations from the *Hadīth*.

In a very famous tradition[32] going back to 'Ā'ishah, it is related at al-Ḥārith b. Hishām having once asked the Prophet saying, "O Apostle of God, how does the revelation come to you?", the latter replied, "Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell *(mithla salsalati al-jarasi)*. And this is the most painful manner of revelation to me; then it leaves me and I have understood (*wa'aitu*) from that noise what He (God) meant to say".

Attention must be drawn to the use of the perfective aspect (*wa'aitu*, "I have understood") in the last sentence, a fact which is quite significant in this context as Ibn Khaldūn pointed out long ago. What Muḥammad is trying to convey thereby seems to be that while he is actually receiving Revelation he does not have the consciousness of hearing any intelligible words spoken; all that he hears is something like a mysterious, indistinct noise (*dawiyy*), but the moment it ceases and he himself returns to the level of normal human consciousness he realizes that the noise has already transformed itself into distinct meaningful words.

The reading "like the ringing of a bell" (*mithla salsalati al-jarasi*) is not so certain as it is usually assumed. The last word, *al-jarasi* ("the bell") may very well be read also as *al-jarsi*; then the phrase would mean "like some low and distinct sound". Besides,

there are several other variants: "like the noise of the beating of some metal", "like the flapping of the wings of a bird", *etc.* Still, what is meant is always some mysterious, indefinable sound.

Then comes the third type, that of verbal communication by means of a special messenger; here Muḥammad not only hears the words spoken, but actually sees the speaker. And it is to this third type that the remaining half of this *Hadīth* refers. There we read: "and sometimes—the Prophet goes on saying—the Angel appears to me in the form of a man and speaks to me, and in this case I understand (*a'ī*) immediately what he says". We must notice that here the verb (*wa'ā*), which has occurred in the perfective aspect (*wa'aitu*) in the first half of the passage, now appears in the imperfective aspect (*a'ī*). This suggests clearly that in this case, and in this case only, Muḥammad hears real words spoken.

Apparently Muḥammad was not only an auditory type of prophet; he was also a visual type. He had many visions at critical points of his prophetic career. And in the Qur'an itself, in two different places reference is made to the appearance of the Mighty Being who transmitted to him Allah's words. One is 53:1-8, the other is 81:15-25.

In the former the Divine messenger is described as *shadīd al-quwā* ("One terrible in power") *i.e.*, a being glorious and majestic, who stood straight in the highest part of the horizon, then drew near and approached till he was at the distance of two bows or nearer, and transmitted the Divine message. The second passage also gives a similar picture.

This majestic and mysterious being who made himself visible to Muḥammad and transmitted to him the Divine words was at first, *i.e.*, in the Makkan period, simply called by the symbolic name of *rūḥ al-quds* ('Holy Spirit').

﴿قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِن رَّبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيُثَبِّتَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ﴾

Say: the Holy Spirit has brought it down [*nazzala*, a verbal form corresponding to *tanzīl*] *with truth from thy Lord, to confirm those who believe and to be guidance and good tidings to those who have surrendered (muslimīn).*

Al-Naḥl, 16:104 [102]

It is also called *al-rūh al-amīn*, the 'Trustworthy Spirit':

﴿وَإِنَّهُ لَتَنزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ، نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُّبِينٍ﴾

And verily this is a revelation [*tanzīl* lit. 'sending down'] *of the Lord of the Universe, which the Trustworthy Spirit has brought down upon thy heart so that thou (Muḥammad) mayest be one of the warners, in clear Arabic language.*

Al-Shu'arā, 26:192-195

At the same time it is strongly emphasized that it is not an inspiration coming from the *Jinn* (26:210-211—the word *al-shayāṭīn*, Satans, being synonymous in this kind of context with *Jinn*.)

Later, in Madīnah, this 'Holy Spirit' comes to be identified as the Angel Gabriel[33] (*Jibrīl* or *Jabrīl*). And in many of the authentic *Ḥadīths*, the Divine messenger who brought down Revelation to Muḥammad is said to have been from the very first *Jibrīl*.

So if we are to stop at this stage of analysis, we should simply say that the Revelation is a three-person verbal relation, $A \rightarrow M \rightarrow B$, in which the initial point is Allah, the final point is the Prophet, and the middle term is the angel Gabriel. And yet, to say the truth, we should not stop at this stage, because our analysis of the concept of Revelation has not yet reached its end. We must go further into the fourth stage of analysis.

At the fourth stage, the very purpose of the Divine Revelation is the main problem. As we have just seen, God reveals His will through a heavenly messenger to Muḥammad. But Muḥammad himself is not the final point. Revelation does not aim at the personal salvation of Muḥammad. God does not speak to Muḥammad in order simply to speak to him. The Divine words should go beyond Muḥammad: they must be transmitted to others. In ordinary cases of speech act ($A \rightarrow B$), A speaks to B, and the speech stops when it reaches B; if the speech is to continue, as a dialogue, then the same process reversed, B, the original hearer becoming now speaker and saying something back to A, the original speaker ($A \leftarrow B$); this is the structure of the usual *kalām*. While in our particular case, B must in his turn become speaker not in the reversed, but in the same direction—or

more correctly, transmitter of what *A* has told him. Here arises the problems of *tablīgh* or *balāgh* (transmission). And *B* is called *rasūl* (apostle) or 'messenger' precisely in the capacity of the transmitter of the Divine words.

Viewed in this light, the concept of Revelation in Islam is not a three-person-relation: it must, in reality, be considered a four-person-relation concept (*A*→*M*→*B*→*C*). According to the Qur'an itself, this *C* was historically the people of Makkah at first, then the Arabs as a whole, then all the so-called People of the Scripture, and then finally the whole mankind. *B* is not simply a man who receives Divine Revelation; he is a man who receives it and then transmits it to the people. In this sense, just as the angel Gabriel was a messenger[34] (*rasūl*) sent by God to Muhammad, Muhammad himself is now a *rasūl Allāh* (God's Messenger), acting as an intermediary between God and the world.

﴿قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي ضَلَالَةٌ وَلَكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ، أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَأَنصَحُ لَكُمْ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

O my people, there is no error in me, but I am a messenger (rasūlun) sent by the Lord of the Universe. I convey (uballighu) to you message of my Lord.[35]

Al-A'rāf, 7:59-60 [61-62]

﴿فَإِن تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا عَلَى رَسُولِنَا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ﴾

Know that the sole duty of Our messenger is to convey (al-balāgh) clearly (the Divine words).

Al-Mā'idah, 5:93 [92]

Many other examples could be given, but the idea is so clear that it is not necessary to do so.

Linguistically this opens a very interesting and important problem. Since *B* is the transmitter of what *A* has said, *B* must memorize and transmit *A*'s speech word by word. It must be conveyed to *C* exactly in the words and phrases in which it has been given. Not even the slightest change or omission is permissible. In other words, the Divine words, when they reach and are received by *B*, must form an objective entity, an objective linguistic work—a *sprachwerk*, as

the Germans would say. The Divine words as an objective *sprachwerk* in this sense are called *qur'ān*. The word *qur'ān*, whatever its etymological meaning may be, means in this context a piece of Divine Revelation as an objective entity. Of course the whole body of the individual *qur'āns* may also be designated by the same word, and this is evidently the most usual sense in which the word *Qur'ān* (or more popularly Koran) is understood now. However, this was not its original meaning.

In any case it is the most important duty or function of a Prophet to keep in memory the revealed text literally so that he may convey it to his people without altering even a word. If any modification occurs, then the Prophet may be accused of having committed the grave sin of *taḥrīf* which means 'turning round', 'twisting', 'falsification' (the verb being *ḥarrafa*), although it is particularly the case when the modification has been done intentionally. In the Qur'an we see the Jews constantly accused of having "intentionally twisted" the revealed words.[36]

Revelation in the technical sense of the word differs essentially in respect from the non-technical, or pre-technical, concept of *waḥy* which I explained above. There, as we saw, 'revelation'—if we can use this term legitimately in such a case—is a kind of prompting to action. It may not be verbal: the man who receives inspiration in this sense may not have a clear consciousness of the exact words and phrases that have being spoken to him. The main point is that he should understand the idea itself and act in accordance with it.

Take for example the following verse:

﴿وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى مُوسَى أَنْ أَلْقِ عَصَاكَ فَإِذَا هِيَ تَلْقَفُ مَا يَأْفِكُونَ﴾

And We revealed (awḥaynā) to Moses: "Throw down thy rod!" And (he threw it down), lo, it (immediately changed into a snake and) swallowed up what they (i.e. the Egyptian magicians) had schemed.

Al-A'rāf, 7:114 [117]

As we see, God simply commanded Moses to cast his staff and he cast it accordingly. The sole purpose of *waḥy* here is to prompt certain action; it is a kind of imperative. The words themselves do not count. The purpose of *waḥy* once achieved, it is no longer

necessary for the words to remain permanently, as a *sprachwerk*.

In the case of Revelation in the proper, technical sense, every word and every phrase should remain permanently as an objective *sprachwerk*. Muḥammad himself was keenly conscious of the extreme importance of keeping in memory, while he was receiving revelation, the exact words and phrases as they were being given. This is clearly reflected in the Qur'an. In the Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, we see Muḥammad admonished not to move his tongue in haste to follow the revealed sequence of words.[37] For there is danger, in doing this, of Muḥammad's forming unintentionally in advance the words that are about to come, instead of waiting calmly and quietly until the revelation comes to an end. But it is clear that this haste or impatience on Muḥammad's part was due to his prophetic consciousness that he should not forget even a single word. God Himself assures Muḥammad in the same passage that He will take care of everything, so that all Muḥammad has to do is wait until the revelation assumes a definite verbal form, and follow its wording passively.

And this is one of the reasons why from the point of view of Islam the Qur'an is 'inimitable' (*mu'jiz*). And this constitutes the famous problem of the 'inimitability of the Qur'an' (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*). Ibn Khaldūn explains the point in the following way. The Qur'an occupies a unique position and stands alone among all the divine books, because here we have the text of revelation in its original form while in the case of the Torah and the Gospel, he says, the prophets received the revelation only in the form of ideas, which they, after they returned to the normal state, formulated and expressed in their own words.—We must observe in parentheses that this is not wholly true, because in the Hebrew prophetic books there are preserved some revelations in verse-form in their original wording, as they were given to the Prophets. But as a whole this *is* true, because the bulk of the Old Testament text is a work of professional writers.—Hence all the heavenly books, Ibn Khaldūn concludes, with the sole exception of the Qur'an, do not have 'inimitability'.

The word *nabīy*, as I have said, means, with regard to that particular aspect which is directly related to the concept of Revelation, a man specially chosen by God Himself to receive Revelation to the exclusion of all others, to make a *sprachwerk* out of it by memorizing the original wording to the minutest detail, and then to

transmit it to his community.

As to the origin of this Arabic word itself, the Western scholars unanimously maintain that it is a borrowing from the Hebrew *nābhī'*. Here we seem to detect a confusion of 'word' with 'concept'. It is true that the particular connotation of transmitter of Divine Revelation was something completely foreign to the Bedouin Arabs, who had no idea at all of what Revelation was and in this sense it certainly belonged to the circle of the monotheistic ideas, that was historically bound up with a long Biblical tradition; and so it is but natural that the word *nabīy* should not appear in the pre-Islamic poetry of the Bedouins. But this should not be taken to mean that the word itself is a direct borrowing from Hebrew. The word *nabīy*, in both its formation and its root meaning, belongs to the genuine Arabic stock. The root *NB'* goes beyond Arabic far back into the Semitic antiquity with the meaning of 'anouncing' and 'proclaiming'. However this may be, the etymological question is of a secondary importance for our purpose. What is much more important from our standpoint is to know whether the Qur'anic concept of *nabīy* coincides completely with the Biblical concept of *nābhī'*.[38] And for this purpose we must push our analysis a step further.

When we, trying to isolate the characteristic features of the Qur'anic concept of 'Prophet', examine it carefully from the semantical point of view, we find two points standing out as worthy of special attention. These two points are both of a negative nature.

One of them is that the Arabic *nabīy* has essentially nothing to do with prophecy or prophesying in the sense of future-telling. A *nabīy*, in the Qur'anic conception, is not a foreteller of the future. The root from which the word *nabīy* has been derived, *NB'*, has, as we have just said, certainly the meaning of 'announcing', 'giving news of something' and yet it is not towards the future that the concept faces. In the Qur'an, the news brought by a Prophet is always news of the *ghayb* (the unseen world of God). The Prophetic activity is always centered around transmission of the Divine Will. Of course in a certain sense, the detailed description of Hell and Paradise that will be disclosed to the eyes of mankind on the Day of Judgment may be said to be a prediction of the future. But this is far different in nature from a description of some impending and imminent event which is about to happen to a definite person or definite nation as often happens with the Hebrew prophets seeing beforehand what will

come to pass in the future; this is not at all part of the function of the Arabian *nabīy*. But this was not so easily understood by Muḥammad's contemporaries, as is evidenced by the very fact that he was on many occasions asked by various men to predict future events, great and small. In the minds of those people, the concept of *nabīy* seems to have been still vaguely associated and confused even, with the old traditional concept of *kāhin*.

The second of the negative characteristics of the semantic structure of *nabīy* is that the words he speaks or conveys have nothing to do with magic. This is an extremely important point, because it is perhaps from this angle that we can distinguish most appropriately the Islamic concept of Revelation from all manifestations of the Arabian shamanism, like poetry and oracles.

In pre-Islamic times, the *saj'* which was the style of all inspiration, and *rajaz* which was the first poetic form developed from the *saj'*, both of them are mainly used for purposes associated in some way or other with word-magic. In those ancient days, words uttered in measured lines and with recurring rhymes were believed to be endued with strong magical powers. The Prophet Muḥammad himself recognized, according to many *Hadīths*, the very real power the rhyme possessed. As a matter of fact Muḥammad was greatly helped, in his campaign against the pagans, by his favorite poet Ḥassān ibn Thābit who stood in high estimation among the Muslims precisely in this capacity, despite all that the Qur'an says disparagingly about poets and their low moral standard. It is related that Muḥammad once remarked to this poet:

«لَشِعْرُكَ أَشَدُّ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ وَقْعِ السِّهَامِ فِي غَلَسِ الظَّلَامِ».

> Your poetry is much more dangerous to our enemy than arrows shot in dark of night.[39]

Poets, in short, were venerated and dreaded in pre-Islamic times chiefly, if not solely, because of the magical release of supernatural power they commanded against their enemy, whether personal or tribal.

There is a certain respect in which the poetic use of language presents a striking similarity, both in nature and structure, to the prophetic speech which I have described above, for in the case of a

poet as in that of a prophet, the word uttered should form an objective entity—a *sprachwerk*. The words he utters should be memorized exactly as they fall from his lips and transmitted to others in the original form. Springing from a supernatural source, his words also should go beyond him ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$). But launched against C, the poet's enemy, his *sprachwerk* is no longer a linguistic phenomenon in the proper sense of the word; it is rather a magical phenomenon; the poet's speech is here a magical force that works upon C, binds him up, and destroys him.

The same was true of the *saj'*-style of soothsayers. As a true poet could handle *rajaz* poetry in a destructive way, so a real soothsayer was able to handle *saj'*-prose in such a way that he could mortally wound his enemy by the magical power of the rhyme. The magical words uttered by a competent soothsayer are often compared in old Arabic literature to deadly arrows shot by night which fly unseen by their victims; the verb most frequently used in such contexts is *ramā* which means 'shooting'. They are also compared to sharp, cutting spears that are poisonous, that inflict wounds from which the victims can scarcely hope to recover. What made these rhymed words most dangerous was that these curses and counter-curses, once released, had an uncontrollable activity of their own, and nobody, even the poet or the soothsayer himself who had released them could restrain the malignant and destructive forces thus released. The *qawāfī* once said exercised an enduring and unrestrainable magical power.

It is evident that the Qur'anic Revelation had nothing at all to do this kind of release of magical power. *Saj'*, as we have seen, had two different aspects in the pre-Islamic age: it was, on the one hand, the language of inspiration: all supernatural inspiration, whatever its source, took linguistically this form. It was, on the other hand, a particular use of language for releasing the magical power contained in the words. This second aspect completely disappears in the Qur'anic usage of the rhyme-words, *al-qawāfī*. I have already shown on several occasions[40] that in the Qur'an many of the old pre-Islamic words and concepts are used with entirely new connotations; they have been adjusted to an entirely new conceptual framework. Old concepts are there, but they have undergone a drastic semantic transformation by having been put into a new system of values. Something similar happened to *saj'*: the old traditional form of

supernatural communication is used, but it is used as a vehicle for conveying a new content. This is my answer to whether the Qur'anic style is *saj'* or not, and if it is, then how we should understand this fact in terms of the fundamental difference between *Jāhiliyyah* and Islam. The form is still there; but it is now a pure form of supernatural inspiration. It is not used for the purpose of releasing the magical power of words, nor is it a form in which to couch 'prophecy' in the sense of foretelling future events.

IV. Revelation in Arabic

In what precedes we have been concerned with the *parole* aspect of Revelation, that is to say, with the problem of the Qur'anic concept of Revelation as a 'speech' phenomenon. It is time now we turned to its *langue* aspect.

Langue is, as already noted, a system of verbal signs recognized by common consent as the means of communication among all individuals belonging to one community. It is in this sense a social fact, *fait social* as defined by Durkheim in his sociology. It is a symbolic system peculiar to a community, to which every member of the community must resort in talking with others if he wishes at all to make himself understood. There can be no linguistic communication less the two persons involved in speech (*kalām*) resort to the same system of signs.

The Qur'an shows the clearest consciousness of this fact, and it possesses most evidently the concept of language understood in the sense of this modern technical term *langue*. The Qur'an bases its conception of Revelation and prophetic mission on this very idea. It starts from the recognition of the fact that each 'people' (*qawm*) has its own *langue*, and it attaches a great significance to this fact in regard to the phenomenon of prophetic mission. Thus in the Sūrah Ibrāhīm we read:

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلاَّ بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ﴾

We never send an Apostle except with the language (i.e. langue*) of his people, so that he might make the message intelligible.*

Ibrāhīm, 14:4

As the peoples of the world differ in color, so they differ in language.[41] And no adequate understanding, *i.e.*, communication, is possible where there is no common language.[42]

And, we are told, this is why an Arabic speaking Prophet is now sent to Arabs with an Arabic Revelation:

﴿إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

We have sent this down as an Arabic Qur'an (qur'ānan 'arabiyyan) that you may understand.

Hajj, 22:2

﴿وَإِنَّهُ لَتَنزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ، نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُّبِينٍ﴾

Verily this is the revelation of the Lord of the Universe, which the Trustworthy Spirit (i.e. Gabriel) has brought down upon thy heart, so thou mayest be one of the warners, in clear Arabic language (bi lisānin 'arabiyyin mubīnin).

Shu'arā', 26:192-195

Just as Moses was given a Book in his language, so now the Arabian Prophet is given a book in the Arabic language[43] (*lisānan 'arabiyyan*).

For if God made His revelation in some non-Arabic language, then the people would never believe, there being no understanding at all.

﴿وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا أَعْجَمِيًّا لَّقَالُوا لَوْلاَ فُصِّلَتْ ءَايَاتُهُ ءَاعْجَمِيٌّ وَعَرَبِيٌّ﴾

If we had made it a Qur'an in some non-Arabic language (a'jamiyyan) they would say: Why are not its verses made intelligible? Is it non-Arabic (a'jamiyyun) and Arabic ('arabiyyun)? (i.e., a non-Arabic revelation given to an Arabian prophet?).

Fussilat, 41:44

Likewise if God should reveal this Arabic Qur'an to a non-Arab prophet and let him recite it in Arabic to his people, who are of

course incapable understanding it, they would never believe in him

﴿ وَلَوْ نَزَّلْنَٰهُ عَلَىٰ بَعْضِ ٱلْأَعْجَمِينَ فَقَرَأَهُۥ
عَلَيْهِم مَّا كَانُوا۟ بِهِۦ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴾

Had We sent this down upon some non-Arabian (prophet), and had he recited it to them (in Arabic), they would not have believed in it.

Al-Shu'arā', 26:189 [199].

All these verses are, as we see, based on the view that each community has its own language, and that there is an inseparable tie between a community and its language. And this is tantamount to saying that the Qur'an has the concept of *langue* in the modern technical sense of the word. This concept is in the Qur'an signified by the word *lisān* (tongue).

The Qur'an itself gives a sure indication that a malicious rumor was being circulated among the Arabs at that time that the Qur'an was not a divine revelation, that, in reality, there was a man behind Muḥammad, a man versed in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, who was teaching him what to say under the name of Revelation. Al-Ṭabarī mentions several Christian slaves of foreign origin whose names were on the lips of the *Kāfirs* who were spreading this rumor.[44]

However—the Qur'an argues against this accusation—the native language (*lisān*) of the man to whom they attribute all this is non-Arabic (*a'jamī*), while this is a clear Arabic language (*lisānun 'arabiyyun mubīnun*), the implication being that anyone whose language is not Arabic would be absolutely incapable of teaching Muḥammad what to say in pure Arabic.

This and some other verses which I have just quoted have brought to our attention a very important word *a'jamī*. We will do well to discuss this problem in terms of the basic contrast between *'Arab* and *'Ajam*. In the eyes the ancient Arabs all the peoples of the known world were divisible into two categories: the Arabs and the non-Arabs. In the latter category all the non-Arab peoples known to them were simply lumped together without any distinction. These two concepts were not exclusively linguistic, because blood, *i.e.* race, also played an important role, particularly in the concept of *'Arab*. But the most decisive factor was undoubtedly language. This is evidenced

by the fact that even a man of pure Arab origin, if he was not able to speak Arabic properly, was very often called *a'jamī*.

This, by the way, has led some of the authorities to the view that there is a fine distinction between *a'jamī* (or *'ajam*) and *'ajamī*. The former means, according to this view, a man who is incapable of expressing himself correctly and clearly, even if he be a real Arab racially, while the latter means a man, who racially belongs to a non-Arab people without any regard as to whether he speaks Arabic well or not. However not all lexicographers agree to this view.

In any case, it is certain that in *Jāhiliyyah* the root *'JM* had a very wide range of application. The basic meaning seems to have been the extreme obscurity of one's speech, whether it is just a temporary casual state or a permanent state due to one's being a foreigner. The following verse by al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥumān is very interesting in this respect.

وَقَالُوا تَبَيَّنْ هَلْ تَرَى بَيْنَ ضَارِجٍ وَنَهْيِ أَكُفٍّ صَارِخاً غَيْرَ أَعْجَمَا

> And they said: Observe well, can you see between Ḍārij and the rainpit of Akuff anyone crying for help that is not voiceless (*a'jam*)?[45]

Here *a'jam* means a man who has lost his voice as a result of having been crying for help so long and in vain. And of course this extreme obscurity of speech, when it goes to its utmost limit, coincides with perfect silence. And the verb *ista'jama* was used just for this meaning.

We have for example in the *Ḥadīth*: *Ista'jamat 'alay-hi qirā'atuhu,*[46] which means literally "His reading or recitation (of the Holy Book) became silent against him" *i.e.* the man was overcome by drowsiness while he was reciting the Book and could not continue reading it. This usage of the verb is also very old, and examples are found in pre-Islamic poetry.

Finally, the idea of linguistic obscurity may take another direction: animals, cattle and the brutes are called *a'jam*. I will give only one simple example from the *Ḥadīth*: *al-'ajmā'u jurḥu-hā jubārun.*[47] The word *al-'ajmā'* is the feminine form of *a'jam*, meaning *bahīmah* ('animal'). The meaning of the *Ḥadīth* itself is: As to the brutes, injury (including death) caused by them is *jubār* (*i.e.*, bloodshed which does not deserve punishment): that is to say, no vengeance

should be taken for any injury caused by the brutes.

These examples will be enough to show that anybody, or anything that is incapable of speaking in a proper human way is *a'jam*. This also shows at the same time that the term *a'jam* or *'ajam* was originally a pejorative term: in other words, it implied a disparaging and contemptuous attitude on the part of the Arabs towards those who could not speak Arabic, which was in their eyes the richest, the most beautiful, and the most perfect language in the whole world. To be unable to speak this perfect language was, for them, almost equivalent to being born speechless.

The same depreciating attitude towards peoples incapable of speaking Arabic underlies the usage of the onomatopoeic word *timtim*, which is often used in reference to the language of the Abyssinians (*timtim habashī*, "an Ethiopean Timtim" or *tamātim sūd*, "black Timtims").

It is surprising that in the midst of such a world the Qur'an took a fair and impartial attitude towards this problem. It did not see any natural superiority of the Arabic language over non-Arabic languages. It is true that by the rise of Islam a really unique position was assigned to Arabic as *the* langauge of Divine Revelation. But this was not, properly speaking, intended to be the open declaration of the superiority of Arabic. Nor is there, for that matter, a declaration in the Qur'an of the racial superiority of the Arabs. For the famous verse quoted above (3:106 [110]) which runs, "You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind" can only refer contextually to the religious community of Muslims as distinguished from other communities of the People of Scripture and not to the Arabs as a nation.

The Qur'anic view of this problem is based on the very clear cultural consciousness that each nation has its own language, and Arabic is the language of the Arabs, and it is, in this capacity, only one of many languages. If God chose this language, it was not for its intrinsic value as a language but simply for its usefulness, that is because the message was addressed primarily to the Arabic speaking people. We see the Qur'an itself declaring again and again that this Book was revealed in Arabic simply in order to facilitate the understanding. "We have sent this down in Arabic so that you might understand" (12:2).

And this corresponds to the more general Islamic attitude

towards the problem of racial difference. In the very famous Sūrah 49:13 as well as in Muhammad's farewell speech it is explicitly stated that in Islam all men, whether Arabs or non-Arabs, are perfectly equal.

Where does this fundamental Qur'anic attitude come from? In order to account for this seemingly strange fact we have only to recall what was said above regarding the cultural situation in which the Arabs were living at the time when Islam was born among them.

Arabia at that time was not a closed world; on the contrary, it was an open world in lively contact with other peoples speaking different languages with widely different cultural traditions.

Roughly speaking, the Arabs of that age may be divided into two different categories or types: one was the pure, genuine Bedouin type who lived in a closed society, conservative, traditionalist, reluctant to admit anything new into their mode of living and mode of thinking, and the other was a more enlightened sort, widely open to other forms of life and thought than their own, ready to accept or even ready to go out of their tribal society in search of new and higher cultural values.

The first type of Arabs were the real children of the desert, living strictly within the narrow limits of the tribal structure of society, living in the tribe, with the tribe, and for the tribe. The very basis of their sentiments, emotions and thoughts was essentially tribal. Of course even they had to come into close contact with foreigners if only for the reason that the wine-dealers were mostly Christians, Jews and Persians, and they were people who could not imagine life without wine-drinking, and we know from their poetry that they were familiar also with the devout and meditative life of the Syrian Christian monks who lived here and there in the midst of the desert and whose solitary lamps lit in the darkness served as guides to travellers by night. And yet on the whole the Bedouins were far more concerned with themselves than with other nations. Their interest was almost exclusively centered around their tribal affairs.

Compared with this genuine Bedouin type, the second type was a far enlightened one—the class of cosmopolitans of that age. And the *Jāhiliyyah* produced a great number of them, among whom we find some of the greatest names in the history of Arabic literature like Labīd, al-A'shā, al-Nābighah, *etc.*

Of course, these were also, at bottom, tribal Bedouins as regards

their mode of life, their mode of thinking, and mode of reaction in general. So it is but natural that we should find them sharing with the first type many, or even most, of the mental traits which may be considered typically Bedouin. And it need cause no surprise if we find also many border-line cases, or overlapping areas between the two classes. Thus, to take one telling example, the poet al-Nābighah, who displayed a genuine Bedouin-ness in his thinking and expression, was also an outstanding figure in this second class.

And yet, as a whole, there is one remarkable feature which draws a clear line of demarcation between the purely tribal Bedouin type and the cosmopolitan type. Those who fell under this second category lived on an international level: they had a mind open to all the foreign cultures and peoples that surrounded them, that had even infiltrated deep into the Arabian Peninsula. They were the intellectuals of the age, who breathed an enlighened air, and whose intellectual horizon was not at all limited to the narrow confines of Arabia; they left their souls free to be influenced culturally by the surrounding peoples with a far higher degree of civilization. They had enough curiosity to venture into unknown worlds, learn new ideas, and assimilate them. Unlike the first type, their minds were not at all confined to the tribal matters.

We see a typical example of this category in the poet al-A'shā al-Akbar who travelled all through the peninsula from North to South, went over its border and visited Jerusalem and Homs, went to Iraq, and even crossed Iraq into the Sassanian Empire of Persia and brought back from there a number of Persian words and concepts, which he put into his poetry together with some Christian ideas which he had learned from the people of the kingdom of Ḥīrah. He was so much interested in, and influenced by, the things he saw outside of Arabia that he almost became a Christian in his view of life and world outlook. He seems even to have travelled to Ethiopia in search of new ideas.

The state of affairs just described will make us understand why, contrary to our naive expectation, we do not find in the Qur'an a declaration of the natural superiority of the Arabic language. The Prophet Muhammad as a man belonged to this second type of Arabs, and the Qur'anic outlook over the surrounding world was also evidently of this second type, for it was based on the recognition of the existence of various nations and various communities on the

earth. The spirit of the Qur'an, in this respect, was a definite and daring break with the old tribal spirit so characteristic of the Bedouin Arabs.

The world in which the Prophet began to develop a new religious activity was not a closed tribal society; it was an open world of lively cultural contact and cultural competition among a number of different nations. The level of cultural consciousness on which the Qur'an worked upon the religious feeling of the Arabs was much higher than that of the Bedouins of the desert.

We must recall in this connection the above-cited verses[48] of the Qur'an, in which a deep distrust is manifested in the Bedouin mentality as regards religious matters.

In other places we are told that the Bedouins are the most difficult people to handle in the matter of religion and belief. They are stubborn, obstinate, haughty and arrogant; and the vainglory prevents them from acquiring the virtue of humbleness which, however, is the very gist of the religious mind as Islam understands it.

All the evidence, in short, points to the fact that the cultural and spiritual sphere in which the Arabian Prophet lived and worked was essentially different from, and even diametrically opposed, in certain important respects, to the world in which the Bedouins lived. The Bedouins of the desert stood far below the level of cultural consciousness at which Islam addressed itself to the Arabic speaking people. And on this high level of world conception, the Arabs were after all but one among many different peoples, and the Arabic language, too, was one of many different languages.

Thus we see why the Qur'an, in spite of the constant emphasis it places on its being in Arabic, does not consider itself a manifesto of the superiority of this language. Each community has its own language. So when God sent down His Revelation to the Israelites in the form of the Torah, He chose Hebrew as the vehicle of His message, because it was the language of that community. The same is true of other Revelations sent to other nations: each people of Scripture had their own *kitāb* in the language of the community. Likewise, all Messengers who were raised before Muḥammad addressed each of his people (*qawm*) in their particular language. So it is now with Muḥammad. Since he is primarily an Arabian prophet and Arabian apostle he is sent with a *kitāb* in Arabic. Otherwise, there would be no reason why the Arabic language should be

preferred to other languages.

This central idea of the Qur'an was quite in keeping with the broad world outlook which I have just described in some detail. However this was not the way in which the Arabs, or to be more correct the Arab Muslims, understood the whole matter. The evident fact that nowhere in the Qur'an was the superiority of Arabic *per se* stated was simply ignored by them, who had always been so proud of their Arab-ness and their Arabic language.

Quite naturally, the fact that the Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language was taken by the Arabs as the strongest evidence that it was superior to all other languages. If Arabic was chosen by God Himself for the vehicle of Revelation, it was not for any pragmatic usefulness but rather for the intrinsic virtue of this language qua language. Arabic was now the sacred language. And sooner or later the non-Arab Muslims also had to admit, because of their ardor and veneration for the Sacred Book, the natural superiority of this language. And thus the Arabic language qua language ended by assuming a high religious value. This process is admirably well depicted with all its theological implications by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his "Great Commentary", *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*.

This natural tendency of the Arabs, continuing to be dominant all through the Umayyad period, was pushed to its extreme and took on even an emotive nationalistic aspect in the Abbasid period when the Arab *'Aṣabiyyah* was faced with the Persian *Shu'ūbiyyah* which claimed the incomparable superiority of the Persian culture in Islam, including the Persian language, over things Arab.

This movement which arose in the second and third centuries of Islamic history struck a fatal blow at the already declining Arab supremacy in Islam. The people who represented *Shu'ūbiyyah* not only declared openly that all Muslims were completely equal, irrespective of race, nationality and lineage—this much was in complete accordance with the Qur'anic teaching—but went further and said that the non-Arabs were far superior to the Arabs in every respect, who were nothing but poor barbarians of the desert with no cultural background at all, and that all that was significant in Islamic culture went back to non-Arab sources.

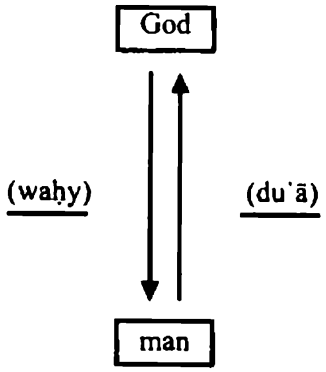
The leaders of the *Shu'ūbiyyah* revolt against the Arabs were naturally mostly Persians, but since the reign of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil they were joined by the Turks too. Even the last

stronghold of the Arabs, *i.e.*, the Arabic language which as I have said, had been raised to sanctity, could not remain safe from the vehement attacks of the *Shu'ūbiyyah*. Enthusiastic partisans made their utmost to bring down the Arabic language from its sacred throne and run into the opposite extreme of extolling non-Arabic languages like Greek, Persian and Indian as far more perfect than Arabic, both as a tool of logical thinking and as a means of expression for poetic sentiments and emotions.

This is indeed an extremely interesting and important phase of the history of Islamic culture. But of course the problem lies beyond the confines of the present study.

V. Prayer (*Al-Du'ā'*)

In the last section we have analyzed the concept of Revelation in the Qur'an. The long and short of it is that *waḥy* in its narrow—properly religious—sense is a particular sort of verbal communication that takes place between God and man in the descending direction, from God to man. God addresses His words directly to man: directly to the Prophet, and indirectly to mankind in general.



But this linguistic relation between God and man is not unilateral. In other words, instead of remaining always passive, man on his part sometimes takes the initiative in establishing a verbal relation with God and tries to communicate with Him by means of linguistic signs. The result is a phenomenon which structurally corresponds to Revelation in that the latter is a direct verbal communication in the ascending direction, from man to God. Like Revelation, this also can occur only in a very special form under unusual conditions. Normally, man has at his disposal no means of addressing God directly, if only for the reason that this would violate

the most fundamental principle of language that there should be an ontological equality between the two parties in order that a exchange of words might occur. Only in an extraordinary situation, when man finds himself in an unusual, non-daily state of mind, when for some reason or other his mind has been strained almost to a breaking point, is he in a position to address words directly to God. In such a situation, man can no longer be a man in an ordinary sense; he is as al-Kirmānī says in the passage quoted above, necessarily transformed into something above himself. This type of linguistic event in a non-daily situation is *du'ā'* which is usually translated 'prayer'. The immediate cause which induces man to use language in this way may differ from case to case. It may be deep and overbrimming piety towards God. Or it may be—and as a matter of fact it *is* the most usual case—imminent danger of death. We see in the Qur'an even the unbelieving pagans calling upon God in an emergency "making their faith sincere".

﴿وَإِذَا مَسَّ الإِنسَانَ الضُّرُّ دَعَانَا لِجَنبِهِ أَوْ قَاعِدًا أَوْ قَائِمًا فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُ ضُرَّهُ مَرَّ كَأَن لَّمْ يَدْعُنَا إِلَى ضُرٍّ مَّسَّهُ﴾

When some misfortune visits a man, he calls upon Us for help (da'ā-nā), reclining on his side, or sitting, or standing. But when We have removed misfortune he goes his way as if he had never called upon Us for help because of the misfortune that visited him.

Yūnus, 10:13 [12]

﴿... وَجَاءَهُمُ الْمَوْجُ مِن كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ أُحِيطَ بِهِمْ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ لَئِنْ أَنجَيْتَنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ﴾

(At the last moment when they feel certain of their death by shipwreck) they call upon God for help (da'ā), making their religion sincere: If thou deliverest us from this, we shall truly be of the thankful![49]

Yūnus, 10:23 [22]

In any case it is clear that this kind of linguistic behavior occurs only in an extraordinary situation which puts man out of his normal daily frame of mind. In other words, for such a thing to occur, the

speaker must find himself in a 'limit situation' as the existentialists would say. For only in a limited situation can the human heart be completely purified of all mundane thoughts, and accordingly the language he speaks becomes heightened spiritually. *Du'ā'* is the most intimate personal conversation of the heart with God that occurs only when the human heart happens to be in such a state.

The following verse shows better than anything else this basic relation of *du'ā'* with a 'limit situation':

﴿قُلْ أَرَءَيْتَكُمْ إِنْ أَتَاكُمْ عَذَابُ اللَّهِ أَوْ أَتَتْكُمُ السَّاعَةُ أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَدْعُونَ إِنْ كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ، بَلْ إِيَّاهُ تَدْعُونَ﴾

If the chastisement of God comes upon you, or the Hour (i.e. the Last Hour) comes upon you, will you be calling upon other than God? (Answer) if you are truthful. Nay, upon Him alone will you be calling!

Al-An'ām, 6:40-41

When this original spiritual tension becomes somewhat relaxed, and the whole thing, instead of passing away as a mere momentary phenomenon, transforms itself into a fixed, deep-rooted pious habit, then *du'ā'* becomes synonymous with *'ibādah* (worshipping).[50]

﴿قُلْ إِنِّي نُهِيتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ﴾

Say: I am forbidden to worship (a'buda) those upon whom you call (i.e. the idols) apart from God.

Al-An'ām, 6:56

﴿وَلَا تَطْرُدِ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ﴾

Drive not away those who call upon their Lord at morn and evening, desiring His countenance.

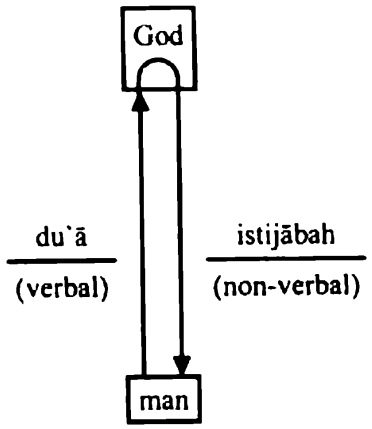
Al-An'ām, 6:52

﴿وَأَقِيمُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ عِندَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ﴾

Set your faces in every place of worship (towards God) and call upon Him, making your religion sincere.

Al-A'rāf, 7:30 [29]

It may be well to recall at this point that Revelation, as I have explained in the preceding section, is primarily designed to elicit a human response, either positive or negative. When God sends down his *āyāt*, He demands man to respond to them with *taṣdīq* and 'belief'. In like manner, the human act of *du'ā'* wants to be responded to by God. Man, in other words, addresses his *du'ā'* to God in the expectation that his wish be granted. The Divine response to the human *du'ā'* is signified in the Qur'an by the word *istijābah* meaning literally 'answering', 'being ready in response'. Semantically we may describe this by saying that the concept of *du'ā'* stands in correlation with that of *istijābah*. Unlike *du'ā'*, which is essentially verbal, *istijābah* is non-verbal.



In the Qur'an, God Himself declares positively that He is always ready to "answer" if only man call upon Him sincerely.

﴿وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ﴾

Your Lord has said: Call upon Me, and I will answer you.

Ghāfir, 40:60

Moreover, the Qur'an attaches the highest importance to the concept of *istijābah*, as is evident from the fact that it makes the incapacity for *istijābah* one of the most salient marks of a false god. The gods whom the *Kāfirs* worship apart from Allah *cannot* respond to their *du'ā'*, however much the worshippers call upon them. They do not hear the *Kāfirs'* prayer, and even if they did, they

would not be able to answer anything. The *du'ā* of the unbelievers goes only astray.

﴿إِن تَدْعُوهُمْ لاَ يَسْمَعُوا دُعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا﴾

If you call upon them (i.e. the idols), they will not hear your du'ā, even if they heard, they would not respond (istajābu) to you.

Fāṭir, 35:15 [14]

﴿لَهُ دَعْوَةُ الْحَقِّ وَالَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِ لاَ يَسْتَجِيبُونَ لَهُم بِشَيْءٍ إِلاَّ كَبَاسِطِ كَفَّيْهِ إِلَى الْمَاءِ لِيَبْلُغَ فَاهُ وَمَا هُوَ بِبَالِغِهِ وَمَا دُعَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلاَّ فِي ضَلاَلٍ﴾

To Him is the real du'ā'. And those upon whom they call apart from Him, do not respond (yastajībū) to them at all, but it is as a man stretches forth his hands towards water that it may come to his mouth, and it will never come. The du'ā' of the Kāfirs goes only astray.

Al-Ra'd, 13:15 [14][51]

Theoretically, this manner of using words may be considered a variety of the 'magical' use of language. By classifying *du'ā'* (prayer) under 'magical' use of words, I am not implying anything depreciatory or pejorative such as may be suggested by the association of the word 'magic' (*sihr*) in the Qur'an. Here the 'magical' must be taken as a pure technical term referring to a particular case in which words in special situations are used in such a way that they may produce some immediate effect on the addressee. Any words one utters in a highly strained psychological state with the intention of affecting one's hearer immediately are 'magical' in this sense. Even in quite ordinary, daily situations, when you use a verb in the imperative form, you are using language in a 'magical' way, although in an extremely weakened and insipid form, so insipid and stereotyped that we do not regard it usually as 'magical'. Still the underlying principle is quite the same.

Magical use of language in a more technical sense is a large class comprising besides personal 'prayer' addressed to God, oath-making, swearing. imprecation, blessing, *etc.* In *Jāhiliyyah*, the

magical function of language played a tremendous role in society But this aspect of the linguistic life of the Arabs has been explored long ago by Goldzieher[52] so fully and in such a scholarly way that there is almost nothing left for us to say.

Notes

1. The part of this chapter which concerns the problem of Revelation in the Qur'an appeared earlier as a separate article in *Studies in Medieval Thought*, Journal of the Japanese Society of Medieval Philosophy (Vol. V, 1962) under the title of "Revelation as a Linguistic in Islam". But the chapter is not an exact reproduction of the article, although the problems treated as well as the main argument remain in the nature of the case substantially the same.
2. *Al-Mu'allaqāt*, ed. Fr. Aug. Arnold (Septem Mo'allakāt), Leipzig, 1850, vv. 68-69.
3. Be it remarked in passing that there is in Arabic a special grammatical means of transforming regularly such a word into a 'two-person' word. It is what is generally known under the name of the third derivative form, or the *fa'ala*-form. In contrast to *akala* (eat), *ākala* requires two persons on the stage: somebody eats together with somebody else at the same table.
4. *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, CXX, v. 28.
5. رَاطَنَها بِلِسَانِه Hadīth No. 416, *Musnad*, vol. I, Cairo, 1949.
6. More literally: "as if their rocks contained characters" (*Mu'allaqah*, v. 2). كَمَا ضَمِنَ الوُحِيَّ سِلاَمُها
7. *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XVI, v. 56. See also 'Antarah, *Dīwān*, p. 190, v. 7, where we read: "(as faint) as characters on the parchments dating from the reign of Kisrā". كَوَحْيِ صَحَائِفٍ مِنْ عَهْدِ كِسْرَى
8. Note that the Sūrah itself is entitled *al-Qalam* (the Pen).
9. 7:139 [143].
10. 'Alqamah al-Faḥl, from the famous ode which he composed in competition with Imr' al-Qays, v. 29. For Qur'anic examples of *nādā* see 7:42 [44], where the People of the Garden (*ashāb al-jannah*) address words (*nādā*) to the People of the Fire (*ashāb al-nār*), the distance between the two groups being of course the longest imaginable, 7:21[24]; 5:53[58]; 68:21-24; 63:9; 49:4, *etc*. The only apparent exception 50:40[41], which reads:

﴿وَاسْتَمِعْ يَوْمَ يُنَادِ الْمُنَادِ مِن مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ﴾

"And listen on the day when the Caller (*minādī*) shall call (*yunādī*) from a near place (*makānin qarībin*)." But a little reflection will be sufficient to show that precisely this combination of the seemingly contradictory concepts produces a striking stylistic effect. For the verse refers to a really 'exceptional' case. It describes the coming of the Day of Resurrection, when the Caller, *i.e.* the Angel, calls all people out of their graves to drive them to the place of Judgment. To the ears of the dead who hear the cry, the call gives an extraordinary impression as if somebody were calling them in a large voice from a distant place, which is, strangely enough, so close to them.

11. *Al-A'rāf*, 7:19 [20]; *Al-Nās*, 114:5-6
12. *Dīwān*, VI, 4.
13. I owe this methodological idea to Prof. Ernst Leisi, which he first exposed systematically in his book *Der Wortinhalt, Seine Struktur im Deutchen und Englischen*, Heidelberg, 1953.
14. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. 'Alī al-Kirmānī (ob. 786 A.H.), *Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. I, Cairo, 1939, p. 28.
15. *al-Muqaddimah*, ed. al-Wāfī, Cairo, Vol. I, pp. 346-347, 360.
16. On the problem of linguistic magic, see my *Language and Magic*, Tokyo, 1955.
17. *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, Erster Teil, Leiden, 1896, pp. 1-105.
18. *Dīwān*, XXXIII, vv. 32-34.
19. *Shāḥird*, 'apprentice'—Pahlv. *ashāgard*, Mod. Persian *shāgird*.
20. This reminds us of the Qur'anic expression *tanzīl* (sending down) of the *āyāt*—from the same root *NZL*—which we discussed in the preceding chapter.
21. *Dīwān*, ed. Hirschfeld, London, 1910, 79, the last verse.
22. 27:36. The word *majnūn* literally means "one possessed by a *Jinn*".
23. 23:24.
24. 6:100.
25. 38:158.
26. 26:222.
27. 15:6.
28. al-Bukhārī, *Bāb al-Tawḥīd*.
29. Ibn Isḥāq-Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah Rasūl Allāh*, ed. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1859-60, Vol. I, pp. 10-11.
30. As regards the word *ittasaqa* and its meaning, cf. the Qur'an, 84:18.
31. Also *al-Ḥāqqah*, 69:42.
32. *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, I, No. 2.
33. 2:91 [97].

34. 81:19.
35. Here the words are put in the mouth of the Prophet Noah.
36. See for instance, 3:48 [46].
37. 75:16 [19]. Also in 20:113 [114], we meet with a similar admonition.
38. For a very detailed philological analysis of the word *nābhī'* in Hebrew, see Alfred Guillaume, *Prophecy and Divination*, London, 1938, Lecture III.
39. *Mutaṭraf,* LXVI, II, 189. See for further information my *Language and Magic*, 1955. pp. 130-131.
40. See for example, *Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Qur'an*, chapter VII.
41. 30:21 [22].
42. 18:92 [93].
43. 46:11 [12].
44. 16:105 [103].
45. *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XII, v. 36.
46. استعْجَمتْ عليه قراءتُه
47. اَلْعَجماءُ جرْحُها جبار
48. 49:14-15.
49. For the religious implication of the concept of 'thankfulness', see Chapter 9, section I.
50. For a discussion of the meaning of this word, see the next chapter.
51. See also *Ghāfir*, 40:53 [50].
52. In his study on the *Hijā'* poetry in ancient Arabia, *op. cit,* pp. 1-105.

CHAPTER 8

Jāhiliyyah and Islam

I. Islam and the Concept of Humble Submission

In this chapter we are going to deal with the third aspect of the fundamental relation between God and man: the Lord-servant relation, God as the 'Lord' (*rabb*) and man as His 'servant' (*'abd*).

As already noted, the conception of Allah as 'Lord' was not unknown to the *Jāhilī* Arabs. Only in pre-Islamic times Allah was not the sole, absolute Lord. There were besides Him many *rabbs* and *rabbahs*. Islam acknowledged Him for the first time as the absolute Sovereign, the Only Absolute Lord of the whole world.

This implied that all other things, not only ordinary human beings, but the Prophets and even the Angels should never be considered 'Lords' (*arbāb*) in any sense. In 3:74 [80]; 3:171 [172], for example, we are told that even "the angels who are near stationed to God" (*al-malā'ikah al-muqarrabūn*) will not be allowed to disdain to be His faithful and humble servants.

The establishment of the conception of Allah as the Absolute Lord of all necessarily introduced also a radical change into the conception of the relation between God and man. A new semantic field was formed around this new idea, containing a number of most important key-terms in the Qur'an.

Since God is now the Absolute Sovereign, the only possible attitude for man to take towards Him is that of complete submission, humbleness and humility without reserve. In short, a 'servant' (*'abd*) should act and behave as a 'servant' (*'abd*)—hence the important

semantic development shown by the word *'ibādah*, which from the original literal meaning of "serving Him as a servant", "serving Him as behooves a servant", eventually has come to mean 'worship' and 'cult'. This association of concepts is shown very clearly in the following verse:

﴿رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فَاعْبُدْهُ وَاصْطَبِرْ لِعِبَادَتِهِ﴾

Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. So serve Him and be steadfast in His service.

Al-Tawbah, 9:68 [65]

The primary function of a servant consists naturally in serving his master faithfully, paying constant and careful attention to the latter's wishes whatever he wishes, and obeying without murmuring his commands. This is why so much importance is attached in the Qur'an to the group of terms meaning absolute obedience, submission and humility, like *tā'ah* (obedience),[1] *qunūt* (obedience, humbleness),[2] *khushū'* (submissiveness),[3] *tadarru'* (self-abasement)[4] all these stand in a sharp contrast to the attitude of stubborn refusal to obey, symbolized in the Qur'an by the image of a "hardened heart".

But by far the most important of all the concepts belonging in this class is the concept of *islām* itself, not, of course, in the sense of the historical, objective, religious culture known as Islam—Islam as a result of the process of 'reification', to use the terminology of Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith—but *islām* in the original sense of the determined self-submission, self-surrendering to the Divine Will, *i.e.*, a decisive step taken by each individual person, as his own inner personal and existential problem, towards resigning his soul to God.[5]

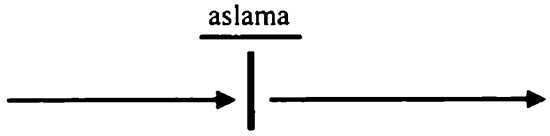
Islām, or the verb *aslama*, in the sense in which it is used in the phrase *aslama wajha-hu li-Allāhi*, lit. "He has submitted his face to God", means originally and primarily that one voluntarily surrenders oneself to the Divine Will putting one's trust wholly in God. It is, in short, the kind of unconditional self-surrender which expresses itself verbally in a verse like this:

﴿رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمَيْنِ﴾

And, Lord, make us submissive to thee!

Al-Baqarah, 2:122 [128]

Now, what makes this concept particularly important among all the concepts relating to humbleness and submission, is primarily of course the fact that God Himself has chosen this as the name of the new Arabian religion. But it is also due to the fact that Islam, as an inner personal religious experience of each individual person, means the occurrence of an important event that marks the initial point from which real obedience and humbleness begin.



(A) Jahili period (B) Islamic period

It marks a decisive turning point in the life of a man, a turning point in the religious sense which cuts his whole length of life into two halves (*A, B*) that will henceforward stand diametrically opposed to each other. Grammatically speaking, the verb *aslama* belongs to a particular group of verbs called 'inchoative'. In other words, instead of denoting a permanent nature, it signifies something new that comes into being for the first time; it marks the beginning of a new situation, the birth of a new nature. Only in the participal form *muslim* does it signify a more or less permanent attribute. But even then the implication is that it is an attribute which has ensued from the decisive step taken.

All the other Qur'anic terms meaning obedience and submission are extremely vague and ambiguous in this respect. They might give the wrong impression of obedience and humility being a natural quality of man. They do not contain in their semantic structure the moment of existential decision, of jumping into an unknown sphere of life. Only the word *islām* implies this. A *muslim* in the original sense is a man who has dared to make such a jump. Of course I am speaking of the Muslims in the earliest period of Islam as depicted in the Qur'an, when all the Muslims without exception, including the Prophet himself, had been once pagans.

It is only after a man has made this decisive jump that such concepts as 'obedience', 'submission' and 'humility' begin to appear invested with a truly religious significance. The words like *khushū'*, *tadarru' etc.* as key-terms in the Qur'an do not mean simple, ordinary humbleness. What is meant thereby is a particular kind of humbleness that ensues from the decisive act of *islām* which we have

just analyzed.

As I have said, the spiritual act of *aslama* ushers in an entirely new period in the life of a man, and the two portions of life separated in this way by the point of *aslama* are of an entirely different nature from each other and are radically opposed to each other. If we call the portion *B* 'Islamic', period *A* may be called '*Jāhilī*' period of a man. It must be kept in mind that we are now talking of the life of an individual man. 'Islamic' and '*Jāhilī*' do not yet designate at this stage two consecutive historical periods, as they do in later Islam. 'Jāhiliyyah' is still a personal quality, not the name of a historic age. In this original sense, '*Jāhilī*' cannot properly be translated as 'pre-Islamic', because it means much more, as we shall see immediately. It does not mean simply a period preceding the rise of Islam; it is something positive, and positively opposed to 'Islamic'.

At any rate, the life of one individual person is divided into two entirely different parts. From now on he is a Muslim, while up till now he has been a *Jāhil*. What does this mean? This is the main problem which will occupy our attention in the following pages.

A man's being a Muslim implies many different things, but from the specific point of view which is ours now, it means primarily that he is a man who has abandoned all his selfishness, all pride in human power, and stands humbled, meek and submissive as a 'servant' (*'abd*) before God who is his Lord (*rabb*) and Master. This *'abd*-ness is the distinguishing feature of the portion *B* in the above diagram..

The portion *A* implies all the personal qualities that are contrary to this absolute submissiveness and humility, all those qualities that prevent man from being submissive and humble to God. Pride in human power, limitless self-confidence, sense of absolute independence, the unshakable determination not to bow before any authority, whether human or divine—in short, all that is contrary to *'abd*-ness. Historically, too, this was one of the most characteristic traits of the pre-Islamic Arab mind.

In fact, the pre-Islamic Arabs were notorious for the personal qualities which have just been mentioned. But far from being moral defects, these represented in their eyes the highest ideal of human virtue, the noblest virtue of a man really worthy of the name of 'man', *al fatā*. For these qualities were all based on, and various

manifestation of, the sense of 'honor' (*'irḍ*) which was deep-rooted in their mentality, and which was, indeed, the highest regulating principle of their conduct.

This prominent *Jāhilī* quality was variously known as *anafah*, literally 'high-nosed-ness', *ibā'* (refusal, *i.e.* to allow one's honor sullied), *ḥamiyyah* (zeal for defending what one has to defend)—a word which occurs in the Qur'an (48:26) precisely in this sense in the particular combination of *ḥamiyyah al-jāhiliyyah* (the *ḥamiyyah* which is characteristic of the *jāhiliyyah*) and *ḥafīẓah* "guarding jealously one's honor". All these words were in use then to mean the noble quality of a noble man who would proudly refuse to accept anything whatsoever that might degrade his personal dignity, a fierce passionate nature to hurl back with scorn anything which might make him feel humbled and humiliated even in the slightest way.

This fiery spirit of resistance which made man refuse resolutely to submit and surrender to the will of any other man, and to sully thereby his honor was indeed the real fountain-head of almost all *Jāhilī* human values. This spirit found its expression in various forms everywhere in pre-Islamic poetry. Here is an example which expresses it in the simplest and most straightforward way:

نَأْبَى عَلَى النَّاسِ الْمَقَادَةَ كُلِّهِمْ حَتَّى نَقُودَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ زِمَامِ

We refuse resolutely to submit to another's direction, whoever he may be! On the contrary, we make all men obey our directions, and that without bit and bridle.[6]

It is worthy of note that the word with which the verse begins, *na'bā*, comes from the verb *abā* which corresponds to the above-mentioned verbal noun *ibā'* (refusing proudly). A man characterized by this haughty spirit of resistance to anything that might tarnish his 'honor' was called *abīy*. An *abīy* was a man who could never acquiesce in being abased by anybody else, and even never allowed any of those who happened to be under his protection to be abased, as Ta'abbaṭa Sharran says in the verse quoted earlier in connection with the problem of human destiny.

At this haughty spirit of *Jāhiliyyah* Islam struck a mortal blow. Or perhaps we should rather say that Islam touched on the sore point of the mentality of the *Jāhilī* Arabs. For it demanded of them, before

anything else, to abandon before the One and Only king of the whole world all pride in human power, the feeling of self-sufficiency, which the Qur'an called *istighnā'* and *tughyān*—from the verb *taghā* meaning a torrent of water rising high to the degree of overflowing (96:6-7), and to feel really humble and submissive to a Will which presides over the whole universe as the supreme Lord.

﴿كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنسَانَ لَيَطْغَىٰ أَن رَّآهُ اسْتَغْنَىٰ﴾

No, indeed, man tends to be insolent (yaṭghā) because he thinks himself self-sufficient (istaghnā').

Al-'Alaq, 96:6-7[7]

From the Islamic point of view, everyone is a servant (*'abd*) of this Lord, and it is his natural duty to manifest his *'abd*-ness in all his actions and sayings, to serve his great Lord with unbounded humbleness and docility. From the point of view of a *Jāhilī* man, however, no one is entitled to demand of him such a thing; he is the Lord of himself. Humble and docile submission to whomsoever it may be, is in his eyes simple servitude—*i.e.* *'abd*-ness in the sense of being an abject slave as opposed to a free-born Arab (*ḥurr*).

Again from the Islamic point of view this refusal of self-surrender on the part of *Jāhilī* Arabs was nothing but a manifestation of human presumptuousness, insolence and arrogance caused by man's ignorance of himself and of God. This is why in the Qur'an the word *istikbār* (to be haughty)—or more literally, "to consider oneself great"—and its synonyms play such an important role in the critical description of the attitude of the *Kāfirs*. In fact, the over-bearing haughtiness and the mocking attitude that ensues from it are described minutely and vividly everywhere in the Qur'an as the most characteristic feature of the pagan Arabs.

This is, in short, the spirit of the *Jāhiliyyah* to which the Qur'an refers in the Sūrah al-Fatḥ.

﴿إِذْ جَعَلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْحَمِيَّةَ حَمِيَّةَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ﴾

When the Kāfirs set up in their hearts the hamiyyah, that hamiyyah so, characteristic of the Jāhil-ness.

Al-Fatḥ, 48:26

Thus we see here before our eyes another basic conceptual conflict between two irreconcilable principles: *jāhiliyyah* on the one hand, and *islām* on the other, that is, haughtiness, arrogance and insolence on the one hand, and humbleness and submission on the other, towards one and the same object—Allah. And this is undoubtedly the most 'dramatic' moment of the whole Qur'anic *divina commedia*.

It is important to remark in this connection that this radical opposition of *jāhiliyyah* and *islām*, or of *jāhil* on the one hand and *muslim* or *mu'min* on the other, was quite a new situation brought about by the rise of Islam in Arabia, as is easy to see from the very fact that the concept of *muslim* or *mu'min* itself in the religious sense had not been existent in pre-Islamic times.

In pre-Islamic times, *jāhil* (or *jahl*) was sharply opposed to a different concept, viz., *halīm* (or *ḥilm*). But again the problem is very delicate because this concept of *ḥilm*, although quite a different concept from *islām*, is not so different as to have nothing in common with it. On the contrary, there is even a certain respect in which we might regard it as the pre-religious, pre-Islamic form of the concept of *islām* itself. This is shown by the fact that when the new religion replaced the old concept of *ḥalīm* by the new concept of *muslim* or *mu'min*, the replacement took place gradually and as a natural process, so to speak, without causing, in this respect, any abrupt break with the old Arabian ethics. How, then, was *ḥilm* replaced smoothly by the new concept of Islam? How does this latter concept link up historically with that of *ḥilm*, as a new interpretation of an old concept? This will be our next problem.

It is a commonplace today among the Orientalists that *jahl* was not in pre-Islamic times contrary of *'ilm*—'ignorance' as opposed to 'knowledge'—as it had been generally believed before Goldzieher published his now famous paper on this problem.[8]

The major points of his thesis have been summarized by many Western writers on the origin of Islam in Arabia,[9] and I myself have referred to this article in my book on the *Structure of the Ethical Terms* and have examined there carefully all the relevant passages in the Qur'an in which the root *JHL* appears under various forms. It would be wearisome to go over again what has so often been discussed. Here I shall take up this problem from a somewhat different angle, trying at the same time, if possible, to push further ahead the

analysis of the conceptual pair: *jahl* and *ḥilm*.

In Islam—or to be more exact, in the Qur'an—*jāhiliyyah* is a religious term in the negative sense, because it is the very basis on which the *kufr* of the *Kāfirs* is based. In fact, it was this haughty spirit of independence, this keenest sense of honor which refused to bow before any authority, be it human or divine, that incited the *Kāfirs* to set up the most determined opposition against the new religion. The *jāhil*-ness was in short, the very root and source of *kufr*.

In pre-Islamic times the word had no religious connotation at all. *Jahl* was simply a human, personal feature; only it was a very characteristic one. It was really something quite typical of the pre-Islamic Arabs. So much so that when we read pre-Islamic poetry, it is, together with its counterpart *ḥilm*, one of those concepts that we meet with almost at every step. Unless we know the exact meaning of this pair of words, *jahl* and *ḥilm*, we cannot hope to understand the psychological make-up of the ancient Arabs, and, consequently, in many cases we would not be able to understand why they acted and reacted as they did, for we would not see the driving motive underlying their peculiar behavior pattern.

The concept of *jahl* being so characteristic of the psychology of the pre-Islamic Arabs it is but natural that the word should occur very frequently in *Jāhilī* poetry. And it is comparatively easy to isolate the basic semantic elements of this word, if we examine carefully the numerous instances of its usage in pre-Islamic literature, applying to them the method of contextual analysis.

The major semantic constituents of this concept which my own analysis has isolated may conveniently be stated in a summary form as follows.

1—The first and the most conspicuous feature of the human nature signified by the word *jahl*—or rather we should perhaps say the root *JHL*, for *jahl* is merely one of the many possible forms under which the root *JHL* appears—concerns a particular behavior pattern.

Jahl is the typical behavior pattern of a hot-blooded impetuous man, who tends to lose his self-control on the slightest provocation, and consequently to act recklessly, driven by an uncontrolable blind passion, without reflecting on the disastrous consequence this behavior might lead to. It is the behavior pattern peculiar to a man

of an extremely touchy and passionate nature, who has no control of his own feelings and emotions, and who, therefore, easily surrenders himself to the dictates of violent passions, losing the sense of what is right and what is wrong.

It is to this aspect of *jahl* that the concept of *ḥilm* is primarily opposed. *Ḥilm* is the nature of a man who is able to stop the outburst of this very *jahl*. *Ḥalīm* is a man who knows how to smother his feelings, to overcome his own blind passions and to remain tranquil and undisturbed whatever happens to him, however much he may be provoked.

If *jahl* is a burning flame of anger—and the image is actually used by *Jāhilī* poets: *iḥtidām*[10] (the verb *iḥtadama*) meaning "to burn with a furious flame and scorching heat"—*ḥilm* is calmness, balanced mind; self-control, and steadiness of judgment.

This contrast between *jahl* and *ḥilm* found its expression in a very interesting metaphor in a verse by 'Amr b. Aḥmar al-Bāhilī. The poet was a *Jāhilī*, who later embraced Islam.

وَدُهْمٍ تُصَادِيهَا الْوَلَائِدُ جِنَّةً إِذَا جَهِلَتْ أَجْوَافُهَا لَمْ تَحَلَّمِ

> Many the large (*jillah*) black cooking pots (*duhm*, lit.: black ones) which our maid-servants take good care of (*tuṣādī-hā*, lit.: flatter and cajole them); once their belly (*i.e.* the content of the pots) becomes *jāhil* (*i.e.*, boils up), it will never become *ḥalīm* (*i.e.* calm down).[11]

The first thing that attracts our attention in this verse is that it describes the cooking pots of the poet's tribe that continue boiling and seething endlessly as if they would never calm down, a very impressive symbol of wealth and limitless hospitality. The poet produces an unusual effect by describing the pots as if they were human beings, and this by ascribing to them metaphorically, two important human qualities: *jahl* and *ḥilm*. For our present purpose, this verse is interesting because this metaphor of a large black seething pot over a burning fire makes us understand better than any lengthy prosaic description the nature of the concept of *jahl* and of its opposite *ḥilm*.

At the same time this metaphor makes us see how appropriate the word *jāhil* is in the Qur'an in the mouth of Joseph in Egypt in describing the dangerous temptation to which he almost yielded.

﴿قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ وَإِلاَّ تَصْرِفْ عَنِّي كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُن مِّنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ﴾

"O my Lord!" he cries, "I would sooner be cast into prison than do that which these women urge me to do. Yet if Thou turnest not from me their temptation, I shall surrender myself to the surge of lust (asbu) for them and so become a jāhil".

Yūsuf, 12:33

The verb *sabā* (*asbu*) is worthy of note in this context. In pre-Islamic literature, it is, so to speak, a technical term in common use in love-poetry for a rushing surge of youthful passion. It means that you are overwhelmed by an unbridled passion that surges up in your heart, disturbs your balance of mind, makes you lose the sense of right and wrong, and drives you towards folly. The following verse by al-Mukhabbal is very illuminating in this respect because it shows the close conceptual relation that exists between *sabā*—which is, as we know from the Qur'anic verse just cited, nothing other than a different name of *jahl*—and *hilm*.[12]

ذَكَرَ الرَّبَابَ وَذِكْرُهَا سُقْمُ فَصَبَا وَلَيْسَ صَبَا حِلْمُ

Suddenly the image of Rabāb came back to his memory, and indeed the remembrance of her is an illness. It made him succumb to a surging passion of love, and once a man has succumbed to the blind passion of love, there can be no place in him for *hilm*.

The same negative combination of *hilm* with *sabā* is seen in the next verse from the same *Dīwān*:[13]

لَيَالِيَ إِنْ تُصْبِي الْحَلِيمَ بِدَلِّهَا ...

Those nights when she tried to provoke passion in the heart of a grave and serious man with her coquetry.

With this, I think a general idea has been given of what kind of a man a *jāhil* is, and what kind of a man a *halīm*. *Jahl*, we have seen, is a behavior pattern peculiar to a hot-blooded man who tends

to lose his temper at the slightest provocation and make himself uncontrolable. At this stage, it has nothing at all to do with the concept of 'ignorance'. A *ḥalīm* is a man who knows how to overcome his surging emotions and passions, who is able to keep himself tranquil and unperturbed under provocation.

I must add one more important remark regarding the meaning structure of *ḥalīm* and *ḥilm*. The explanation I have just given may convey the wrong impression that *ḥilm* were a passive quality, something that would remind one of the natural meekness of a lamb. On the contrary, it is a positive and active power of the soul that is strong enough to curb her own impetuosity that may drive the man headlong to folly, and calm it down to patience and forbearance. It is a sign of the power and superiority of the mind.

There can be no *ḥilm* where there is no power. It is essentially a quality of a man who governs and dominates others, and not of those who are governed and dominated. A naturally weak and powerless person is never called *ḥalīm,* however much he calms down his anger when insulted; he is 'weak' simply. *Ḥalīm* is a man who possesses power, power to go to all kinds of violence when provoked and yet possesses, at the same time, the power to restrain himself from doing violence.

إِنَّ مِنَ الْحِلْمِ ذُلاً أَنْتَ عَارِفُهُ وَالْحِلْمُ عَنْ قُدْرَةٍ فَضْلٌ مِنَ الْكَرَمِ

Here the poet, Sālim b. Wābiṣah, after describing in detail how he always tries and succeeds to check his fits of anger and to keep himself from rushing to acts of violence, whatever those who envy him and hate him do and say against him, reflects and says proudly:

> Verily, to take the attitude of humility consciously is a kind of *ḥilm*, and in fact *ḥilm* based on power (and not coming from *'ajz*, 'natural weakness') is a virtue characteristic of the nobleness of the soul.[14]

In this verse we see clearly stated that the true *ḥilm* is a 'conscious' effort to keep oneself calm despite the fact that one is fully in possession of *qudrah*, 'power' (to strike back). *Ḥalīm* is a man who forgives his enemy and shows gentleness 'from above', from a superior position. This will make us understand the true meaning of the word *ḥalīm* as applied to Allah in the Qur'an.[15] God

forgives sins committed by men and is gentle, but it is not a simple gentleness; it is a gentleness based on power, forbearance based on calm wisdom, which is possible only because it is coupled with an infinite power. It suggests, therefore, that there is always in the background the possibility of a dreadful and drastic punishment.

It is clear, then, that *hilm* is a particular behavior pattern backed by a clear consciousness of one's own superiority and power. It is not a sign of 'natural weakness', *'ajz*; it is a sign of natural 'power' (*qudrah*). That is why the concept of *hilm* is so closely associated with *waqār* meaning the "dignity of manner and deportment".

Since *hilm* is such a particular kind of tranquility which conceals within it a tremendous power, highly compressed inner energy, it is very difficult for it not to make itself manifest in a physical way, in deportment and outward attitude. This bodily manifestation of *hilm* is *waqār*, "grave and dignified bearing"—*waqār al-ḥilm* (*waqār* of *hilm*) as it is often called. Khalaf b. Khalīfah, a famous poet of the Umayyad period gives us an interesting example.

عَلَيْهِمْ وَقَارُ الْحِلْمِ حَتَّى كَأَنَّمَا وَلِيدُهُمْ مِنْ أَجْلِ هَيْبَتِهِ كَهْلُ

All of them show a remarkable of *hilm* so much so that even a small boy among them looks as if he were a man of mature age because of his natural dignity.

This is of course an exaggeration, but it brings out very well an important aspect of the concept of *hilm*.

Waqār is a value word. That is to say, the word represents the outward attitude of a *halīm* as something imposing and admirable. The same 'dignified bearing' may also be looked at with antipathy, from the standpoint of an enemy. Then it would be nothing but the bodily manifestation of sheer 'arrogance'.

... إِذِ الْخَصْمُ أَبْزَى مَائِلُ الرَّأْسِ أَنْكَبُ

When the opponent shows an arrogant attitude, swaggering about with his chest puffed out elatedly (*abzā*), inclining his head on one side, perking up his shoulder.[16]

This a typical description of a 'haughty' man. The inclining of his head on one side[17] was so typical of this kind of man that the

phrase *istaqāma al-akhda'u*,[18] lit. "the neck has straightened up", meant that the man lost his self-confidence and became humiliated.

With all this, it was not always easy, particularly for those who were unable to see things hidden under the surface, to distinguish between a real *halīm*, that is, a man who showed gentleness and meekness because he was tremendously powerful, and a man who was, so to speak, forced to be gentle, and similing simply because he was weak. And a real *halīm* was often mistaken for a weak, powerless man, to whom one could do anything one liked to do without any danger of being hit back.

أَظُنُّ الْحِلْمَ دَلَّ عَلَيَّ قَوْمِي وَقَدْ يُسْتَجْهَلُ الرَّجُلُ الْحَلِيمُ

> I think that it is my apparent meekness (*hilm*) that has induced my tribesmen to do all kinds of wrong and injustice to me, but even a *halīm* man may sometimes be forced to lose his composure and give a free rein to his ebullient anger (*yustajhalu*, lit.: to be forced to become a *jāhil*).[19]

This inability to distinguish between real *hilm* and real weakness made itself manifest not only in the field of mundane, purely human relations, but in a certain sense at the religious level also, namely, in the attitude of the pagan Makkans towards Islam. For, as the Qur'an shows, the disbelieving Makkans full of self-confidence and pride were induced to assume a more and more arrogant attitude towards Islam when they saw that the severe Divine punishment did not actually overtake them as promised so repeatedly by the Revelation. Seen from the point of view of the Muslims, the Makkans mistook Divine *hilm* for weakness and lack of power.

Before closing this part of our discussion, we must mention briefly one more important fact. The above study of the concept of *jahl* will contribute toward elucidating the concept of *ẓulm*, which is another outstanding key-term in the Qur'an.[20]

If the outer manifestation of *hilm* is, as we have just seen, *waqār*, that of *jahl* is *ẓulm*. In most cases *ẓulm* is nothing but a particular form assumed by *jahl* when it bursts out in a physically observable form in behavior; in short, *jahl* is the inside and *ẓulm* is the outside of the matter. This will, I think, make us understand immediately that *zulm* is not a simple 'wrong-doing' as the word is

commonly translated. At the same time, this would seem to make it clear that the basic meaning of the word *zulm*, as it is used in the Qur'an in reference to the attitude of the stubborn disbelievers, should be understood in correlation with *jahl*.

Behind all their acts of *zulm* against the Prophet and his followers, we must see the working of the spirit of *jahl*, as the very source of all these actions. By offering a stubborn and violent resistance to the Prophet and the Divine teaching, they are apparently and seemingly directing their *zulm* towards God Himself. But, in the Qur'anic conception, no one in the whole world can ever direct an act of *zulm* towards God. So they are, in reality, doing *zulm*, not to God, but to themselves. This must be the meaning of the Qur'anic expression *zulm al-nafs*, "doing wrong to oneself".

In order to understand this point still better we have to remember that the concept of *jahl* is a very wide one covering almost the whole range of human life. In other words, whenever a man loses his temper and his self-control, he is being a *jāhil*. But at the higher level of moral life, the concept acquires a very special coloring by being associated with the concept of 'personal honor' (*'ird*). Then it is a particular type of moral indignation caused by the feeling that one's *'ird* is being vitally involved, that one's personal honor has been compromised or violated. This behavior pattern was, as we saw earlier, quite typical of the pre-Islamic Arabs.

In this particular context, *jahl* means an attitude of stern protest against having one's personal honor trampled under foot. It is a determined refusal to be humiliated. This, I think, is exactly what is meant by the above-mentioned phrase in the Qur'an, *hamīyat al-jāhiliyyah*. It is clear from the Qur'an that many pagan Arabs felt as an unbearable humiliation to bow before the absolute authority of God. It did not make much difference to them whether the supreme authority before whom they were commanded to bow was human or divine. The idea itself of surrendering to any superior authority and being commanded to do so was to them unbearably humiliating. They were *jahl* in this particular sense.

And it is evidently this particular moral aspect of *jahl* that plays a major role in the religious world-view of the Qur'an.

2—We now turn to the second semantic element of *jahl*, and in connection with it, that of *ḥilm*, too. This second aspect is directly dependent on the first aspect and derives from it; it is the most natural consequence of *jahl* being such a thing as I have just tried to explain. The second aspect concerns the effect of *jahl* on the intellectual capacity of man. Quite naturally this effect can appear only in a negative way, *i.e.*, destructively. The nature of *jahl* is such that whenever it becomes active it smothers and weakens the reasoning power of the human brain. In order to keep your steadiness of judgment, in whatever situation you may be put, you must be a *halīm*.

Of course one may object to this and say like Ma'bad b. 'Alqamah, a poet contemporary of the Prophet:

... وَتَجْهَلُ أَيْدِينَا وَتَحْلُمُ رَأْيُنَا

Our hands act in a *jāhil* way, yes, but our head remains calm and *ḥalīm*.[21]

This is possible in theory; it is easy to say this, but in practice, it is a feat rarely to be accomplished. How can one see things objectively with an undisturbed tranquility of mind when one is blind with passion? As a general rule, *jahl* causes the weakening, if not complete loss, of the function of reason (*'aql*); only when coupled with *ḥilm*, is *'aql* capable of functioning normally.

It will be easy to see, then, that *ḥilm* has in itself a latent possibility of being developed and elaborated philosophically into something close to the Hellenistic virtue of 'non-perturbation' based on the cultivation of autarcy. The Arabs did not go in this direction.

But *ḥilm* is capable also of being developed in another direction, *i.e.*, in the direction of administrative skill and political wisdom, a remarkable show of tact and statesmanship, based on a perfect control of one's own feelings, in dealing with other people and particularly, in governing and ruling other people. This is what the Arabs did.

In *Jāhiliyyah*, *ḥilm* was unanimously recognized, and highly esteemed, as one of the most essential, indispensable qualities of a *sayyid* or a man standing at the head of the tribesmen, with *siyādah* (tribal chieftaincy) and *ri'āsah* (headman-ship) in his hand.

إِذَا شِئْتَ يَوْماً أَنْ تَسُودَ عَشِيرَةً فَبِالْحِلْمِ سُدْ لاَ بِالتَّسَرُّعِ وَالشَّتْمِ
وَلِلْحِلْمُ خَيْرٌ فَاعْلَمَنَّ مَغَبَّةً مِنَ الْجَهْلِ إِلاَّ أَنْ تُشَمَّسَ مِنْ ظُلْمِ

If you ever want to rule people as their chief, then rule them not with rashness and abusing (*i.e.* rule them with *hilm*). For, indeed, *hilm* produces a better result than *jahl*—you must keep it well in mind—except in your being treated unjustly with excessive hatred and enmity.[22]

Now the *hilm* of the tribe of Quraysh was very famous in Arabia. This does not mean simply that the Makkans were all *halīm* in the original Bedouin sense; it meant primarily that they were clever and shrewd people, clever enough to develop this age-old virtue of the Arabs into a political wisdom. They knew how to manage and control their naturally hot-blooded, touchy neighbours with a clever tact by, first, controlling themselves. Prof. Montgomery Watt sees in this *hilm* of Quraysh, developed into a political wisdom and ruling technique, the very basis on which the Makkans could build up so successfully their mercantile enterprises.[23] And it would not be going too far to ascribe that wise statesmanship displayed by the Prophet himself after the migration to Madīnah to this inborn quality of the Quraysh. Not entirely, perhaps; but still the biographical traditions about Muhammad show most clearly that he was indeed a first-rate statesman and also a man of *hilm*. There must have been some strong inner relationship between the two qualifications. Only, unlike the other Makkans who used this political talent in business and trade, he used it in building up his religious community (*ummah*).

Jahl, as we have seen, is not primarily a permanent nature of man; it denotes occasional outbursts of passion, and as regards its effect on human intellect and reason, it implies momentary, and not necessarily permanent and constant, absence of the balance of mind.

But if a man happens to be constantly in that state, if he is an habitual *jāhil*, then we may reasonably suppose that he is incapable of forming a judicious judgment on any matter. Such a man is mentally blind. He cannot see through things; his sight stops at the surface of things and does not penetrate deep into them. His understanding and observation are bound to be superficial, and he tends to act in all situations according to his superficial understanding.

Thus we arrive at the second meaning of *jahl*: the incapacity of the mind for having deep understanding of things which consequently produces always shallow and rash judgments on everything.

وَأَنْسَى نُشَيْبَةَ وَالْجَاهِلُ الْمُغَمَّرُ يَحْسَبُ أَنِّي نَسِيُّ

How can I ever forget Nushaybah (who has been killed)?! Though a man who cannot see deep (*jāhil*), a *mughammar* (*i.e.* a man with an insufficient experience, a 'greenhorn'), might think (mistakenly) that I am a forgetful man.[24]

This is exactly paralleled by the usage of the same word in the Qur'an, in the Sūrah al-Baqarah, where mention is made of the poor people, who even in dire poverty know how to keep themselves abstinent, *i.e.*, who behave decently and composedly because of their inborn *ḥayā*, "sense of shame" (which was so highly praised by the Prophet, according to *Ḥadīth*, as one of the foundations of religion).

﴿يَحْسَبُهُمُ الْجَاهِلُ أَغْنِيَاءَ مِنَ التَّعَفُّفِ تَعْرِفُهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ﴾

A man who judges things only by seeing the surface (jāhil) may get a wrong impression and consider them rich because of their abstinence and restraint, but thou shalt know them by their mark.

Al-Baqarah, 274 [273]

But of course the Qur'an, in the majority of cases, uses this word in the sense of shallow observation and superficial judgment in reference to matters that are more properly religious. In this religious sense, *jahl* is the incapacity of a man to understand God's Will behind the veil of visible things and events, the incapacity to see the natural things as so many Divine *āyāt*. For this kind of man, the natural things are just natural things, and not symbols of anything. And since, according to the Qur'an, God sends down his *āyāt* in the clearest and most evident way—that is, as *bayyināt*, 'evident (signs)'—*jahl* means the intellectual incapacity to understand even the self-evident religious truth, and even the easiest part of Divine revelation. Examples abound in the Qur'an. Here I give only one of them:

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّنَا نَزَّلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ الْمَلاَئِكَةَ وَكَلَّمَهُمُ الْمَوْتَى وَحَشَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ قُبُلاً مَّا كَانُوا لِيُؤْمِنُوا إِلاَّ أَن يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَجْهَلُونَ﴾

Even if We should sent down the angels to them, and the dead should speak to them, and We should gather all things in array before their own eyes, yet they would not be believers, unless God so willed. But most of them are just jāhils.

Al-An'ām, 6:3

Jahl is not restricted to the superficial observation of things around man; it includes also the incapacity of a man to see 'himself', to take the correct and exact measure of himself. He who does not know himself, who cannot see the natural limitation of his capacity, and who therefore tends to go beyond his human bounds is also a *jāhil*. And from this point of view, words like *tughyān* and *baghy* meaning "exceeding the bounds" are often used by the Qur'an in describing the attitude of the *Kāfirs* towards God, as a concrete manifestation of *jahl*.

In short, *jahl* in this sense is almost equivalent to mental blindness. The Qur'an brings out this aspect of *jahl* in a very pertinent way.

﴿فَإِنَّهَا لاَ تَعْمَى الأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِن تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ﴾

It is not the eyes that are blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that are blind.

Al-Ḥajj, 22:45 [46]

They are mentally blind, and mentally deaf; how, then, can we hope them to understand the religious truth?—this is the final verdict passed upon those who are characterized by *jahl* in this sense.

This aspect of the semantic structure of *jahl* makes us understand easily how its opposite, *ḥilm*, came to acquire the meaning of *'aql* (reason). Reason can only operate properly when you are calm, as long as you keep the balance of *'aql*; the latter is a narrower concept than *ḥilm*. *Ḥilm* is the very basis of 'reason' and 'intellect'. To be very exact, however, it is not a perfect synonym of *'aql*, the latter is a narrower concept than *ḥilm*. *Ḥilm* is the very basis of *'aql*;

it is the unagitated state of the mind which makes the proper activity of *'aql* possible, which enables the *'aql* to operate calmly and steadily so that it may produce good and right judgments. But, practically, of course, the two come to the same thing.

In a satire (*hijā'*) against Banū Ḥarīth b. Ka'b, Ḥassān ibn Thābit uses the word in this particular sense in an extremely interesting way.[25]

حَارِ بْنَ كَعْبٍ أَلاَ الأَحْلاَمُ تَزْجُرُكُمْ عَنِّي وَأَنْتُمْ مِنَ الْجُوفِ الْجَمَاخِيرِ
لاَ بَأْسَ بِالْقَوْمِ مِنْ طُولٍ وَمِنْ عِظَمٍ جِسْمُ الْبِغَالِ وَأَحْلاَمُ الْعَصَافِيرِ

O Banū Ḥarīth! do not your intellects (*aḥlām*, pl. of *ḥilm*) prevent you (lit: scare you back) from attacking me (*i.e.*, by *hijā'*)? But (on reflection I must admit that this is demanding too much of you) for you are all hollow with nothing inside, giants with tiny brains (*jumkhūr*, "a man whose body is big but whose intellect is small and weak"). There is nothing wrong in people's being tall and big, but the combination of a body as a mule and an intellect (*aḥlām*) as small as that of little birds (is too much!).

It is perhaps worthy to be noted that the Qur'an uses the same word in this sense in a very similar way.

﴿أَمْ تَأْمُرُهُمْ أَحْلاَمُهُم بِهَذَا أَمْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ طَاغُونَ﴾

This is said in reference to the inimical attitude of the Makkans towards the Prophet.

Do their intellects bid them do this? (i.e., are they acting like this in accordance with what their poor intellect commands?) Or are they (by nature) an insolent and arrogant people?

Al-Ṭūr, 52:32

3— It is not a far cry from this to the third meaning of the word *jahl*, *i.e.*, 'ignorance'. Here the opposite of *jahl* is no longer *ḥilm*, but *'ilm* (knowledge). This is, as is well known, the most usual meaning of *jahl* in classical Arabic. This, however, is the least important of the three fundamental meanings of the word in the earlier period. Still, pre-Islamic poetry offers some examples though not very many. 'Antarah's *Mu'allaqah*, for instance, (v. 43):

هَلاَّ سَأَلْتِ الْخَيْلَ يا ابْنَةَ مَالِكٍ إِنْ كُنْتِ جَاهِلَةً بِمَا لَمْ تَعْلَمِي

The poet, addressing his beloved 'Ablah (Mālik's daughter), says: "Why don't you ask our horsemen, if you are ignorant, about what you do not know?" meaning thereby "everybody knows how brave and valiant I am on the battle field; ask anybody you like if by any chance you do not know this."

This meaning of "lack of knowledge", "lack of information" does not play an important role in the Qur'an. The word is used mostly either in the first or the second sense. Perhaps we may cite as an example of this:

﴿إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِن قَرِيبٍ﴾

God shall forgive only those who do evil in ignorance (jahālah) but then quickly repent.

An-Nisā', 4:21 [17][26]

II. From *Ḥilm* to Islam

As the word *jāhiliyyah* itself shows, the word *jahl*—the first and the second meaning—is one of the most important key-terms in the Qur'an. Without a right understanding of this concept we would not be able to put the new religious conception of Islam in the right place in the history of the religious thought of the Arabs. But, as we have seen, the two fundamental meanings of *jahl* was sharply opposed to the concept of *ḥilm* in pre-Islamic times. Where is it now, this concept of *ḥilm*, in the Qur'anic system?

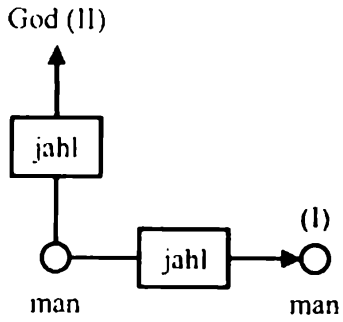
Apparently the word *ḥilm* no longer appears on the stage in an important role except when it is used in reference to God Himself. "Allah is *Ḥalīm*"—this seems to be the only form under which the concept occurs in the Qur'an in a truly significant way. The *ḥilm* that used to be one of the most conspicuous features of the pre-Islamic mentality, that used to appear almost everywhere in pre-Islamic poetry whenever the poets sang in praise of themselves or others, seems to have ceased to play any decisive role, as a human attribute. What does this mean? Does this mean that the concept, which had

once been so important in the ethical life of the Arabs disappeared completely with the rise of the new religion? My answer to this question is in the negative. The explanation I have given of the pair, *jahl-ḥilm*, will have made it clear that the idea of *ḥilm* itself continues to live in the Qur'anic conception of human nature. It is still palpably there, not as a definite concept, but diffused throughout the Qur'an. In a certain sense, the Qur'an as a whole is dominated by the very spirit of *ḥilm*. The constant exhortation to kindness (*iḥsān*) in human relations, the emphasis laid on justice (*'adl*), the forbidding of wrongful violence (*ẓulm*), the bidding of abstinence and control of passions, the criticism of groundless pride and arrogance—all are concrete manifestations of this spirit of *ḥilm*.

But there is something far more important than this. This particular pattern of human behavior called *jahl* is now in the Qur'an directed toward God Himself. Hitherto in the pre-Islamic conception *jahl* had nothing at all to do with God or gods. It was concerned exclusively with human beings in their relations with each other; that is to say, *jahl* was a peculiar attitude of a man toward another man or other men. In short *jahl*, whether good or bad, was exclusively a matter of man-to-man relation.

But now with the rise of Islam in Makkah we witness a different and quite a new situation arising among the Arabs. As noted above the concept of *jahl* is the center of an important network of concepts intimately associated with each other, such as pride in human power, limitless self-confidence, self-sufficiency, refusal to bow before any superior authority, keen sense of honor, haughty attitude of mockery toward one's inferiors, *etc*. The whole network of these concepts is now in the Qur'an directed toward the Prophet Muḥammad and the Book revealed through him, the Divine *āyāt*, and consequently and ultimately toward God Himself.

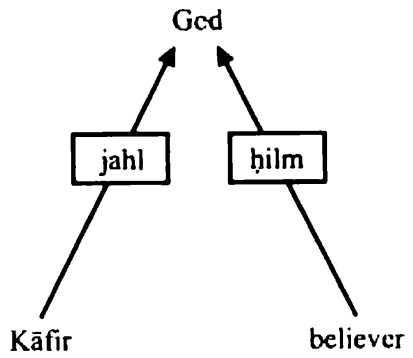
In other words, the Qur'an interprets the attitude of hostility shown by the pagan Arabs toward Divine guidance (*hudā*) in terms of this conceptual network of *jahl*. According to the Qur'an the pagan attitude of hostility is nothing but a concrete manifestation of this *jahl*-mentality which has been so characteristic of the pre-Islamic Arabs.



But we must notice that, if interpreted in this way, *jahl* is no longer what it has been; a radical shift of emphasis has occurred in its structure. For in this interpretation, *jahl* is no longer a 'horizontal', *i.e.* human relation (*Direction I*); it is a relation between man and God. Here we see pagan Arabs taking the attitude of *jahl* toward God (*Direction II*), which is, from the point of view of the Qur'an, an incredible presumptuousness on the part of man, for man is essentially an *'abd* ("absolutely humble servant"), and should be nothing else. So *jahl* in this sense must be banished from the presence of the great Lord. What will remain behind? Quite naturally the opposite concept of *ḥilm*. And this is the only logical consequence, for, in general, when the concept *A* and the concept *B* stand opposed to each other, the negation of *A* logically means the affirmation of *B*. And as a matter of fact, in pre-Islamic times, there was between *jahl* and *ḥilm* precisely such a relation.

But in the new Islamic conception, this relation does not hold between the two concepts when they are directed toward God. As long as *jahl* has been a purely human behavior-pattern, its negation has always meant *ḥilm*. In such a situation, when you are told that you should not act toward your brethren in a *jāhil* way, it necessarily implies that you should act in a *ḥalīm* way. But here in the presence of the great Lord, where man is His *'abd*, and should act as behooves an *'abd*, this either-*jahl*-or-*ḥilm* formula is no longer valid. As an attitude of man toward God, his Lord, *jahl* is of course out of question, but for that matter *ḥilm* is equally out of question, because, as we have already seen, *ḥilm* is essentially based on the concept of 'power' (*qudrah*). As conscious control of one's own feelings and emotions, as forbearance, and patience, outwardly it looks like mere meekness and calmness, but behind it there always is the clearest consciousness of one's own superior power which may at any moment transform itself into a terrible outburst of anger.

This is certainly not the proper attitude for man to take toward God who is his Lord. This cannot be the attitude of an *'abd.*



As noted above, the Qur'an interprets the *Kāfirs'* attitude of hostility and non-submission as an extreme case of human arrogance stemming from the *ḥamiyyah al-jāhiliyyah*. In short, *Kāfirs* dare to take this incredible attitude of *jahl* toward God. This does not imply, however that a real believer should take the alternative attitude of *ḥilm* toward God (as shown in the *Diagram*). For in the Qur'anic view, *ḥilm* would be no less an outrageous act of going beyond the bounds of man than taking the attitude of *jahl.*

A real believer, *i.e.* a real *'abd* (servant) in the fullest sense of the word, should go far beyond the degree of *ḥilm* in the direction of humbleness and humility before God. All consciousness of self-sufficiency and power should be abandoned; absolute submission is what is required of him. But when 'humbleness' reaches this degree, it is no longer *ḥilm*; it is *islām.*

Thus we see how the concept of *islām* is historically affiliated with, and yet at the same time clearly distinguished from, the old concept of *ḥilm.* From the Qur'anic point of view, *islām* in the sense of absolute submission and self-surrender was not a simple downright negation and rejection of *ḥilm*; it was rather a continuation and development of *ḥilm.* The new conception pushed ahead and brought this time-honored virtue of the Arabs to its extreme limit, which was so extreme, indeed, that the concept had to go beyond its original boundary and transform itself into something quite different from it: *islām.* The concept of *islām* was, in this respect, a radical modification of the concept of *ḥilm*, which was necessitated by the very fact that now the object with which man was confronted was no longer an ordinary person, but the majestic figure of his own Lord.

This is what I meant earlier by saying that in a certain sense *ḥilm* was the pre-religious, pre-Islamic form of Islam. But of course

the concept of *ḥilm* itself had to disappear from the stage as a basic religious attitude of man toward God, for in a 'servant' serving his master sincerely, there should not be even the slightest sense of self-sufficiency and superiority. But the concept of *ḥilm* cannot subsist if it is deprived of this latter element. In the Qur'anic conception, only God is fully entitled to be *ḥalīm*—toward His servants, not vice versa.

The fact that the concept of *ḥilm* as a human attribute ceases to be active in the Qur'an suggests that here a new conceptual organization is under way, a new 'articulation', to use one of the technical terms which I explained earlier, of the human reality. According to this new conceptual articulation, the vast field which was once covered by the concept of *ḥilm* has to be entirely reorganized: new lines are being drawn, and new sections are coming into being.

Once the opposition was: *jāhil . . . ḥalīm.*

Now in the Qur'an, the concept of *ḥilm* as the opposite of *jāhl* is giving place to a number of new concepts, the most important of which is *islām* with all that is implied by the word.

At the same time, the concept of *jāhil* itself, which still plays a considerable role in the Qur'anic world-view as a typical attitude of the obstinate and stubborn unbelievers, is being superseded by a still more important concept—that of *kāfir*, again with all that the word implies. And this brings into being, a new opposition: *kāfir . . . muslim.*

This teaches us that behind these two terms we have to read all the religious, and ethical implications of the old contrast between *jāhil* and *ḥalīm*, but in an entirely new light coming from the drastic reorganization of the concepts.

III. The Conception of Religion *(Dīn)* as 'Obedience'

It is not without some hesitation that I take up this problem for discussion in this place, because the whole matter is wrapped in philological uncertainties that are almost hopelessly difficult to clear up. The major argument of this section must necessarily be highly problematical because the key word *dīn* (religion) which forms the very center of the whole discussion is itself problematical as regards its original meaning.

If, in spite of all this, I have decided not to renounce wholly the attempt to analyze the meaning structure of this word, it is mainly for a reason that is of particular relevance to the topic of this chapter, the Lord-servant relation between God and man: namely, because the meaning of the word *dīn* contains, among others a remarkable semantic element of 'obedience' (*ṭā'ah*) and 'servant-ness' (*'ubūdiyyah*). To be sure, it is not certain whether the meaning of 'religion' may be traced back to that of 'obedience' and 'servant-ness'. But this is not an impossibility. Besides, the Qur'an, as we shall see presently, consciously connects these two concepts with one another.

Dīn is certainly one of the most controversial words in the whole Qur'anic vocabulary. The trouble with us, however, is that we cannot in any way lightly pass over the difficulty by simply disregarding the word, because it is an extremely important key-term in the Qur'an. In any case, we must begin by admitting that it is one of the most difficult Qur'anic key-terms to handle semantically. The etymology itself is uncertain, to begin with. Outwardly we have before our eyes one simple monosyllabic word; but it is quite possible that we have, in reality, more than one word under exactly the same form. That is to say, two or more independent words going back to different sources may have come to assume in course of time one and the same form. Besides, there is also possibility of some at least of its various meanings being of foreign origin.

The word *dīn* has two important meanings distinguishable in the Qur'an: (1) religion and (2) judgment. According to some scholars,[27] of these two fundamental meanings, the first *i.e.*, 'religion' is of Persian origin, *den* in Middle Persian meaning roughly '(systematic) religion',[28] and the second, that of 'judgment' goes back to Hebrew; the Hebrew word *dīn* means 'judgment'; moreover the particular combination 'Day of Judgment' (*yawm al-dīn*) is so typically Jewish.

Thus we are here faced with a very complex and complicated problem. As regards this foreign origin theory I fully admit that it is not impossible, but at the same time I cannot help feeling somehow that this is simplifying the matter too much. Before resorting to this kind of explanation, we should, I think, first try to see whether it is not possible to explain the word within the confines of Arabic itself. By this I do not of course imply that there should be one original meaning attached to the root *DYN* to which all the various meanings

might be reduced. This is quite impossible linguistically. In a case like this a modern linguist assumes from the very beginning the existence of more than one independent root under one common form. The phenomenon is one of 'pure polysemy'.

With this in view, let us begin by noting that an examination of pre-Islamic literature brings to light the three following root meanings: (1) 'custom', 'habit', (2) 'requital', and (3) 'obedience'.

The first of these three would be simply dismissed as of no relevance to our present topic, if it were not for the fact that there is a possibility of our deriving the meaning of 'ritual practices' attached as an important semantic element to the word *dīn* from this root meaning of 'custom'. But this is capable also of being explained as a case of 'reification' of the more fundamental concept of 'religion' in the sense of 'personal faith'. However this may be, I must content myself here with giving one example from *Jāhilī* literature.

أَلاَ بَاتَ مَنْ حَوْلِي نِيَاماً وَرُقَّدا وَعَاوَدَنِي حُزْنِي الَّـذِي يَتَجَـدَّدُ
وَعَـاوَدَنِي دِينِي فَبِتُّ كَأَنَّمَا خِلاَلَ ضُلُوعِ الصَّدْرِ شِرْعٌ مُمَدَّدُ

This is part of an elegy which a poet of the Hudhayl tribe composed bewailing the death of a dear friend.

> All those around me have fallen asleep, and once again there comes back to me my sorrow that renews itself. There comes back to me again my habitual state (*dīn*), and I feel as if between the ribs of my breast (*i.e.*, within my breast) there were a string of lute fully stretched (*i.e.*, my breast resounds with sobbing like the sound of a stretched string of a musical instrument).[29]

Turning now to the second root meaning, 'requital', we may do well to remark at the outset that the word *dīn* with this meaning is also found very frequently in pre-Islamic poetry. Here is a typical example of it[30] out of a great number.

فَلَـمَّا صَرَّحَ الشَّـرُّ فَأَمْسَـى وَهُـوَ عُـرْيَانُ
وَلَـمْ يَبْقَ سِوَى الْعُدْوَا نِ دِنَاهُـمْ كَمَا دَانُـوا

> (We had borne their wrong very patiently), but when their wrong became so evident, and began to show itself so nakedly that there

remained nothing but our taking an offensive attitude on our part, we (rose up) and requited (*dinnā*, a verbal form corresponding to *dīn*) them as they had requited us (*i.e.*, as they had done wrong to us—the last expression is what is known in rhetoric as *mushākalah*, the phrase being equivalent to *dannā-hum ka-mā fa'alū*).

The Qur'an, too, uses the same word in a verbal form—passive participle—with exactly the same basic meaning in the Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt:

﴿أَءِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَءِنَّا لَمَدِينُونَ﴾

What! (the unbelievers ask sarcastically) when we are dead and have become dust and bones, shall we then be requited (madīnūn).

Al-Ṣāffāt, 37:16

It is quite significant for our present purposes that this is said precisely in reference to the concept of the Day of Judgment. That is to say, the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-dīn*) is exactly the day on which all men without exception will be requited (*madīnūn*) each according to what he has done in the present world. And this is the meaning of *dīn* in this particular combination.

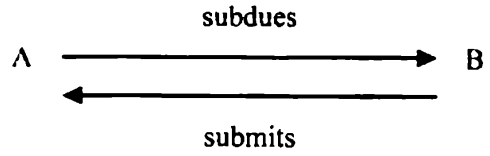
As is evident, the meaning of 'requital', *i.e.* 'judgment', in this context is of supreme importance in the world-view of the Qur'an. But its proper place is in the semantic field of eschatology. It is not of direct relevance to our present topic. What is directly relevant to it is the third root meaning of *dīn*.

The third root meaning of the word *dīn* is, as we have indicated above, 'obedience'. To be very strict, this understanding is not exact because 'obedience' represents only one aspect of the matter. Properly speaking, *dīn* (or the verb *dāna*) belongs to that large category of words known as *addād*, *i.e.* words having two contrary meanings.

In other terms, the word *dīn* has two opposite faces, one positive and the other negative. On its positive side, it means "to subdue, oppress, govern by power", and on its negative side it means "to submit, yield, to be obedient and submissive". There is nothing surprising about this. As many other words of this category, the

particular perspective crystallized in this word represents a global view of the matter which enables us to consider the same thing from both ends.

dīn



This is why in many cases the same word *dīn* is capable of being interpreted as both *qahr* (exercise of superior power in subduing others) and *tā'ah* (obedience), without our being able to tell which of these two possible ways of interpretation is right. The truth of the matter is that both are meant at the same time without distinction, the concept of *dīn* being comprehensive of these two contrary directions.

The classical example of it is provided by a verse by 'Amr b. Kulthūm:[31]

وَرِثْنَا مَجْدَ عَلْقَمَةَ بْنِ سَيْفٍ أَبَاحَ لَنَا حُصُونَ الْمَجْدِ دِينَا

We have inherited the glory of (one of our forefathers) 'Alqamah; it is he who has made lawful to us (*i.e.* who has conquered for us) many strongholds of glory by force (*dīnan=qahran*)—
or
reducing them to the state of absolute obedience and submissiveness (*dīnan=tā'atan*).

The word seems to show the same conceptual 'ambivalence', when Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā, describing the actual situation of his tribe which is in complete disorder and confusion, says:

مَرِجَ الدِّينُ The *dīn* is in utter confusion.

This must mean that the tribe is in the state of anarchy so that nobody is certain as to who is to rule and who is to obey.

The same is probably true of the expression *fī dīni fulān*[32] which is very common in pre-Islamic poetry, "in somebody's *dīn*". The expression belongs, in my opinion, to this category, although the old

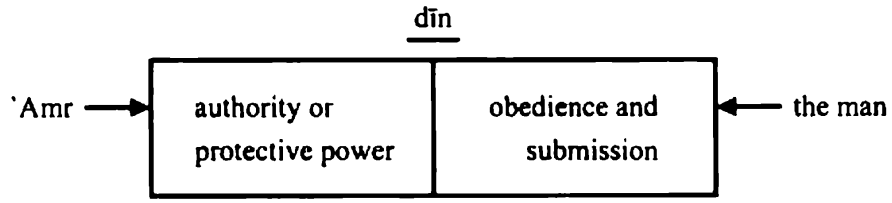
scholiasts almost unanimously take this word in the sense of 'obedience'. Here is a typical example:

لَئِنْ حَلَلْتَ بِجَوٍّ فِي بَنِي أَسَدٍ فِي دِينِ عَمْرٍو وَحَالَتْ بَيْنَنَا فَدَكُ

The poet here threatens a man of Banū Asad who has done him wrong, and says:

> [The poisoned arrow of my satire (*hijā'*) will reach you and overtake you] even if you (flee from me and) settle down in the Wādī Jaww among Banū Asad in 'Amr's *dīr*, and even if Fadak separates between us.[33]

'Amr referred to in this verse is the famous king of Hīrah, 'Amr b. Hind b. al-Mundhir Mā' al-Samā' and the phrase *fī dīni 'Amr* means in this context your becoming a subject of 'Amr and thereby putting yourself under the "protection of his power". Thus the concept of *dīn* here comprises both 'obedience' (*ṭā'ah*) and 'authority' (*sulṭān*). In other word, the same thing is being looked at from two opposite sides:



Looked at from the side of King 'Amr, it is his *sulṭān*, 'authority' or 'protective power', but from the side of the man who shelters himself behind the royal influence, it is *ṭā'ah* (obedience) to the king.

This interpretation must, I think, be applied to the Qur'anic verse 12:76, where we are told how Joseph in Egypt succeeds, by a clever trick, to detain his younger brother Benjamin in custody.

﴿كَذَلِكَ كِدْنَا لِيُوسُفَ مَا كَانَ لِيَأْخُذَ أَخَاهُ فِي دِينِ الْمَلِكِ
إِلَّا أَن يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ﴾

> *(Thus We contrived for Joseph's sake); he could not have kept his brother in the dīn of the Egyptian king, except that God willed.*
>
> *Yūsuf*, 12:76

This phrase is usually taken to mean "according to the king's law" (*fī dīni al-malik=fī shar'i al-malik*, or *fī qānūni-hi*). This is, I think, one of the instances of reading into the Qur'an a later conception that could only arise after the concept of *shar'* as 'religious law' had been well established.

In the same way, the word *dīn* may be taken in the sense of both "humble obedience" and "absolute rule" in 16:54 [52], an exceedingly beautiful passage which describes how all things in the heavens and the earth are "making prostration before God" expressing thereby profound humility and absolute obedience.

﴿وَلَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ وَلَهُ الدِّينُ وَاصِبًا﴾

To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. His is the dīn for ever!

Al-Nahl, 16:54 [52]

The word *dīn* in this verse has—if the above interpretation is right—a double meaning. On the one hand, it means the absolute *Sultān* of God, and, on the other, *i.e.* if looked at from the side of His creature, it means "absolute obedience".

Very often, however, the word is used in pre-Islamic poetry in the more specified sense of 'obedience', 'being ruled' and 'being a servant'.

أَبَوْا دِينَ الْمُلُوكِ فَهُمْ لِقَاحٌ

They refused to be ruled by the kings, for they were so filled with self-confidence; .

(*laqāḥ* is the infinitive of the verb *laqiha* meaning to 'conceive', 'become pregnant', here in the metaphorical sense of 'being pregnant with self-confidence').[34]

We may do well to compare this with verse 25 of the *Mu'allaqah* of 'Amr b. Kulthūm where exactly the same thought is expressed by means of the verb *dāna* itself:

... عَصَيْنَا الْمَلِكَ فِيهَا أَنْ نَدِينَا

We used to disobey the king in those days for fear of becoming his slaves

Similarly in the following verse by an anonymous poet:

إِذَا انْتَدَى وَاحْتَبَى بِالسَّيْفِ دَانَ لَهُ شُوسُ الرِّجَالِ خُضُوعَ الْجُرْبِ لِلطَّالِي

Whenever he attended the tribal gathering or girded on a sword, even the haughtiest men became humble to him just like mangy camels obey docilely the man who smears them with pitch.[35]

The reference is to the fact that the mangy camels show themselves passively obedient to the man who smears their bodies with ointment, because it makes them feel pleasant.

This concept of absolute obedience and humble submission with a tacit understanding that there is behind the stage someone exercising an overwhelming power and domination may very well have been the origrin of the important meaning of 'religion' attached to the word *dīn*. And if this is so it would be quite unnecessary to go beyond the limits of Arabic and seek its origin in the Persian word *dīn* (MP *den*, Avest. *daena*). The formal coincidence might have been purely accidental.[36] I think this is quite possible and probable, because this conception of religion based on the image of a submissive servant ruled absolutely by a powerful king is quite in line with the typically Semitic mode of thinking.

I do not think it a pure accident that in the Qur'an, in two crucial passages, the word *dīn* is virtually defined in terms of *'abada*, *i.e.* 'to worship God' in the sense of "serving Him as a humble servant who obeys his master".

﴿أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِّن دِينِي فَلاَ أَعْبُدُ الَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ أَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ﴾

O men, if you are in doubt of my religion (dīnī), then (I declare that) I serve (a'budu) not those whom you serve (ta'budūna) apart from God, but I serve (a'budu) God.[37]

Yūnus, 10:104

﴿قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ لاَ أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ، وَلاَ أَنتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ، وَلاَ أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَا عَبَدتُمْ، وَلاَ أَنتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ، لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ﴾

O unbelievers, I serve (a'budu) not what you serve (ta'budūna), nor do you serve what I serve. And I shall never serve what you serve, nor will you serve what I serve. To you your religion (dīnu-kum) and to me my religion (dīnī).

Al-Kāfirūn, 109:1-6

Equally remarkable is the combination in the following verse[38] of the verb *'abada* with the expression "making the religion (*dīn*) sincere" with which we are already familiar:

﴿إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ﴾

I have been commanded to serve (a'buda) God making my religion (dīn) pure and sincere.

Al Zumar, 39:14 [11]

The combination of *dīn* with *'abada* in the passages just quoted cannot possibly be merely contextual. It is understandable only on the supposition that there is a profound inner connection between the two concepts. These passages can be taken almost as a definition of the word *dīn* suggesting how it should be understood rightly.

It is worthy to be pointed out, too, that, at a more formalized level, the same word *dīn* is also associated in the Qur'an with the word *islām*. We must remember in this connection that, as we have seen above, the concept of *islām* was, originally at least, based on the conception of man's being a 'submissive' servant of God.

﴿إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِندَ اللَّهِ الإِسْلاَمُ﴾

Verily, the (true) religion (dīn) with God is Islam.

Āli 'Imrān, 3:17 [19]

﴿الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الإِسْلاَمَ دِينًا﴾

This day I have perfected your religion (dīn), and completed My favor unto you, and I have approved Islam for your religion (dīn).

Al-Mā'idah, 5:5 [3]

According to Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith[39] the word 'religion' in general may be taken in two different, although closely related, senses; one is 'religion' as a deep personal matter; the existential act of each individual person of believing in something, that is, in short, 'faith'; and the other is 'religion' in a 'reified' sense, *i.e.* as something common to a community, an objective communal matter, comprising all the creeds and ritual practices shared by all members of that community. Both of these menaings are found in the Qur'an and this double usage of the same word seems to go back to *Jāhiliyyah*, although in *Jāhiliyyah*, except perhaps in Jewish and Christian circles, 'religion' as a personal existential act does not seem to have been clearly formulated and clearly distinguished from 'religion' in the sense of a whole body of ritual practices. Perhaps we should rather think that such a distinction itself was something quite alien to the religious consciousness of the pre-Islamic Arabs. Perhaps in looking for such a distinction in *jāhilī* thought we are unconsciously trying to read into it a conception which is a product of later ages.

When for example, the poet al-Nābighah says, in reference to the Christians of Ghassān,[40] *dīnu-hum qawīmun* we cannot decide definitely whether he means that their faith is steadfast or their religion, Christianity, is an upright religion. Likewise when the Ḥanīf poet Umayyah calls his standpoint *dīn al-ḥanīfiyyah*, "the Ḥanifitic religion", it is not clear whether what is meant is 'reified' religion on a non-reified personal faith—perhaps both at the same time, we should say, if we are to strict to this basic distinction.

As to the meaning of *dīn* as a system of ritual practices it is quite certain that the concept was firmly established in the mind of pre-Islamic Arabs. I will give here a most interesting example.[41]

حَيَّاكِ وَدٌّ فَإِنَّ لاَ يَحِلُّ لَنَا لَهْوُ النِّسَاءِ وَإِنَّ الدِّينَ قَدْ عَزَمَا

The poet is taking leave of a beautiful girl who is trying to tempt him, and declares that he has now more serious things to be concerned with than love-making. *Wadd*, by the way, is a pagan idol mentioned also in the Qur'an (71:22 [23]).

> May Wadd give you a long life! (*i.e.* fare you well!) for dalliance with women is no longer lawful to me, since I have firmly made up my

mind to concentrate upon *dīn*.

The context shows clearly that 'religion' (*dīn*) in this verse refers to the pagan, pre-Islamic custom of pilgrimage to Makkah. The poet says that now that he made up his mind firmly and seriously to make his pilgrimage to Makkah, sporting with women is *harām*. The point of immediate relevance to our present topic is that here we have a case in which the word *dīn* is used clearly in the sense of *hajj*, *i.e.* 'pilgrimage' as a ritual.

This particular usage of the word *dīn* by al-Nābighah would seem to suggest that when the pre-Islamic Arabs used the expression *dīn al-nasārā* ("the religion of the Christians"), for example, they presumably meant thereby 'religion' as something reified, an objectively established thing, *i.e.* a whole system consisting of a certain number of creeds and ritual practices that are shared by a community.[42]

The Qur'an uses the word obviously in the reified and non-reified senses. The best and the simplest example of non-reified type is supplied by the expression "making the *dīn* sincere", where the word *dīn* cannot but mean personal faith in God, whether it be just momentary or permanent. As an example of the reified use, we may cite 3:66 [73], where the Jews are depicted saying among themselves:

﴿وَلاَ تُؤْمِنُوا إِلاَّ لِمَن تَبِعَ دِينَكُمْ﴾

Do not trust except those who follow your religion.

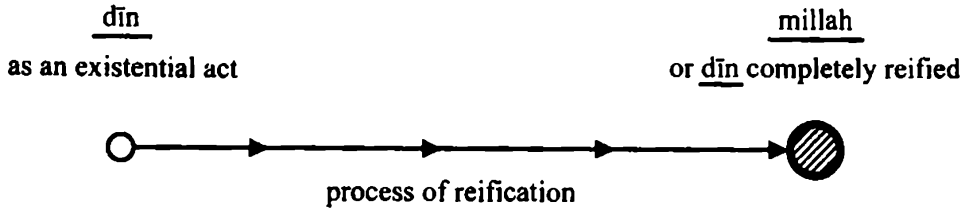
Āli 'Imrān, 3:66 [73]

In the verse already quoted above (verse 5 [3]) which runs, "This day I have perfected your religion . . . and I have approved *islām* for your religion", *dīn* seems to mean almost an objective, reified 'religion'.

If we go still further in this direction *i.e.* the direction of reification, than the concept changes into *millah*, which is religion as an objective 'thing' in the full sense of the word, a formal system of creed and rituals which constitutes the principle of unity for a particular religious community and works as the basis of its social life. Unlike the word *dīn* which still retains the original connotation of personal existential, we might say--faith and belief however far

we may go in the direction of reification, *millah* connotes something rigid, objective, formal and it reminds us always of the existence of a society based one common religion.

The relation between these two key-terms may be shown by this simple diagram:



Dīn originates from a purely personal 'obedience', as we have seen. It goes on being reified; in the last stages of this development approaching more and more the concept of *millah*, *dīn* becomes almost synonymous with the latter. This point will become clear if we compare 3:66 [73] which we have quoted above with 2:114 [120] where exactly the same situation is referred to by means of *millah* instead of *dīn*.

﴿وَلَن تَرْضَى عَنكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلاَ النَّصَارَى حَتَّى تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ﴾

Neither the Jews nor Christians will ever be satisfied with thee, unless thou follow their religion (millah).

Al-Baqarah, 2:114 [120]

The synonymity of *dīn* and *millah* appears more clearly in 6:162 [161] where we read:

﴿إِنَّنِي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيَمًا مِّلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا﴾

As for me, my Lord has guided me to a straight path, a right religion (dīn) the religion (millah) of Abraham who was a man of pure monotheism.

Al-An'ām, 6:162 [161]

It is significant that we see here three important concepts equated with each other, straight path=right *dīn=millah* of Abraham.

But if we retrace our steps towards the starting point (*dīn*), then we will see *dīn* and *millah* becoming more and more clearly dis-

tinguished from each other, and therefore, non-interchangeable. For example, in 39:2 we read:

﴿إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ فَاعْبُدِ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَّهُ الدِّينَ﴾

Verily, we have sent down to thee the Book with truth. So worship (u'bud, "serve as a servant") God, making the dīn sincere for Him.

Al-Zumar, 39:2

Here God addresses these words directly to the Prophet Muhammad and exhorts him to serve God as behooves His servant. It is evidently impossible to replace the word *dīn* in this context by *millah*. For here the matter concerns the religious attitude of each individual person, and not the objectively formalized system of religion. *Millah* is essentially a matter of *ummah*, while *dīn* in its original, non-reified, phase, is a matter of each individual believer.

Notes

1. 5:93 [92].
2. 2:110 [118].
3. 57:15 [16].
4. 6:42 [43].
5. Like most of the Qur'anic key-terms, *islām*, or at least its verbal form *aslama*, has its pre-Islamic history. In *Jāhiliyyah* the word meant "giving over" in general. To be more precise, *aslama* means that a man gives over something which is particularly dear to him, precious to him, something which is difficult or painful for him to abandon, to somebody who demands it. This precious something may be his own self, which is of course, in most cases, the most precious possession a man has in his hand; (in which case it means naturally total submission, self-surrendering); it may also be somebody else, one of his dear friends or his tribesmen (in which case it would mean betrayal). In any case the basic meaning is that of giving over one's precious possession to somebody else.
6. 'Abīd b. al-Abraṣ, *Dīwān*, XL, v. 20.
7. Cf. also what Prof. M. Watt says on these two words in his *Muhammad at Mecca*, pp. 66-67.
8. "Was ist unter 'al-Ǧahilijja' zu verstehen?" (*Muhammadanische*

Studien I, pp. 219-228).

9. See among others, for example, the excellent summary by Prof. A. J. Arberry in his *The Seven Odes*, pp. 251-253.
10. For example, *al-Ḥamāsah*, DCCLXVIII, v. 3.
11. *al-Ḥamāsah*, DCCLXII, v. 1.
12. *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XXI, v. 1.
13. XIV, v. 8. The poet is al-Muzarrid.
14. *al-Ḥamāsah*, CDXIII, v. 5.
15. For instance, 3:149 [155]:
﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ﴾
Verily God is All-forgiving, Halīm.
Examples abound in the Qur'an.
16. By an anonymous poet of Banū Faq'as, *al-Ḥamāsah*, L, v. 2.
17. الْمُوَلِّي رَأْسَه as Laylā al-Akhyaliyyah says, *al-Ḥamāsah*, DCXCIX, v. 1.
18. *akhda'* properly means "the occipital artery".
19. Qays b. Zuhayr, a pre-Islamic poet, *al-Ḥamāsah*, CXLVII, v. 4.
20. The concept itself has been subjected to a detailed semantical analysis in my *Structure*, pp. 152-159.
21. *al-Ḥamāsah*, Tibrīzī recession, CCIII, v. 6.
22. al-Marrār b Sa'īd, *al-Ḥamāsah,* CDI, vv. 1-2.
23. See M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, pp. 10-11.
24. Abū Dhu'ayb, *Dīwān al-Hudhaliyyīn*, I, p. 67, v. 2.
25. *al-Majānī al-Ḥadīthah* ed. al-Bustānī, Vol. II, p. 29.
26. Also 6:54.
27. Cf. Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, Baroda, 1938.
28. Cf. Wilfred C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, New York, 1963, pp. 287-289.
29. Sa'īdah b. Ju'ayyah, *Dīwān al-Hudhaliyyīn*, I, p. 236, vv. 122.
30. Sahl b. Shabān, al-Ḥamāsah, II, v. 4.
31. *Mu'allaqah*, v. 61.
32. فِي دِينِ فُلَانٍ
33. *Dīwān Zuhayr*, p. 138, v. 1.
34. 'Abīd b. al-Abraṣ, *Dīwān*, VI, v. 2.
35. *al-Ḥamāsah*, DCCIX, v. 1.
36. Contrast this with an adverse view advocated by Dr. Wilfred C. Smith in his book, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (pp. 98-102), according to which the Arabic word *dīn* was a local variety of an 'international term' of Persian origin, *dīn* or *den*, which had spread widely over the countries of the Middle East.
37. *a'budu, ta'budūna*: from the root *'BD*, from which comes the word

'abd (servant, slave).

38. It goes without saying that in this and similar contexts "making the religion sincere" does not imply at all 'momentary sincerity' as it does in the case of *Kāfirs*.
39. *op. cit.* pp. 51-53.
40. Quoted above, see Chapter 4, section IV.
41. al-Nābighah, *Dīwān*, p. 142, v. 3. This famous and extremely important verse has long been misunderstood in various ways in the West. For the details, see C. A. Nallino, "Il verso di an-Nābighah sul dio Wadd", in *Raccolta di Scritti*, Vol. III, VI. In the *Dīwān*, the second word *wadd* is replaced by *rabbī* ("My Lord"). That this is not the original form is known from Yāqūt's Geographical Dictionary *Mu'jam al-Buldān* (ed. Wüstenfeld IV, 913).
42. Theodore Nöldeke in his *Beiträge zur Kenntniss der Poesie der alten Araber* (Hannover, 1864), p. 52, cites from *al-Aghānī* an interesting verse in which a Jew contemporary of the Prophet uses the expression *dīn Muhammad* in reference to Islam.

CHAPTER 9

Ethical Relation Between God and Man

I. God of Mercy

We have, in what precedes, dealt with three different aspects of the basic personal relation between God and man. In this chapter, we turn to the fourth—and last, according to our classification—relation between them *i.e.* the ethical relation. It is one of the most conspicuous features of the religious thought that has originated in the Semitic world, whether of Judaism, Christianity or Islam, that the concept of God is essentially ethical. And since, in this view God Himself is essentially ethical, the relation between God and man must also be of an ethical nature. In other words, God acts towards man in an ethical way, that is, as God of Justice and Goodness, and man, correspondingly, is expected to respond to this Divine initiative also in an ethical way. Whether man really does respond in the right ethical way, is a crucial and decisive moment in the structure of a religion like Islam. It is not a mere matter of human goodness or badness as it used to be in pre-Islamic times; ethics is now an integral part of religion; the whole religion is involved in it, and is indeed dependent on the ethical response of man.

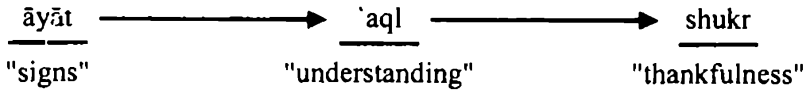
From this point of view, the God of the Qur'an shows two diff-crent as aspects that are fundamentally opposed to each other. For a pious, believing mind, these two aspects are but two different sides of one and the same God, but for the logic of ordinary reason, they

would seem contradictory, and, in fact, many thinkers have been at pains to reconcile these two aspects with one .another. The problem is common to both the Qur'an and the Old Testament.

In one of these two aspects Allah reveals Himself as God of infinite goodness and benevolence, God of unfathomable love and mercy, a gracious, a merciful and forgiving God. This aspect of God is referred to in the Qur'an by such key-words as *ni'mah* (favor), *fadl* (bounty), *rahmah* (mercy), *maghfirah* (forgiveness) and the like.

The problem has been so much discussed and so fully dealt with by all those who have studied the Qur'an and Islam from the religious point of view that I have almost nothing more to add.[1]

Only one point must be mentioned here, which is more directly relevant to the purpose of the present study. The fact that God acts towards man in such a gracious way and shows all sorts of goodness and kind consideration in the form of *āyāt* (signs)—this initial fact already determines the only right response possible on the part of human beings. And that response is 'thankfulness' or 'gratitude' (*shukr*), thankfulness for all the favors He is bestowing upon them. But as I have said before, this response is conceivable only on the basis of a right understanding and estimation of the Divine *āyāt*. Thankfulness in this sense is possible only when man has grasped the meaning of the *āyāt*.



This is the typical scheme of the conceptual associations relating to this phenomenon. And thus, for the first time in the history of ideas among the Arabs, *shukr* (thankfulness) became a religious concept. The tremendous importance of this new concept will be seen from the fact that it is, so to speak, the human counterpart of the initial Divine Goodness, and is, in this way, inseparably linked with one of the most characteristic aspects of the Divine nature, and also from the fact that from 'thankfulness' to 'belief' or 'faith' it is merely a matter of one step, so much so that in many cases *shukr* is in the Qur'an almost synonymous with *īmān* (belief). This we saw already when we discussed the concept of *āyah*.

The opposite of *shukr* is *kufr*, the proper meaning of which is 'ungratefulness' or 'ingratitude'. Without any further explanation it

will be quite easy to see how this concept of ingratitude, which before Islam, had nothing at all to do with religion, came to assume in the Qur'anic system a peculiarly religious significance.

But before it began to be understood in this religious sense, the conceptual structure itself was there in *Jāhiliyyah* firmly established. And no wonder, for even in ordinary mundane relations among men the human ethics everywhere demands the actualization of this structure. When somebody has shown you some special favor, that is, has conferred upon you a *ni'mah*, your natural reaction to it should be gratitude and thankfulness. This is one of the most basic laws governing the ethical relations among men. But it is also an undeniable fact that there is an alternative reaction, which violates this very basic moral law. And unfortunately, the human nature seems to incite and instigate man to act very often in this way. As the Qur'an itself says:

﴿إِنَّ الإِنسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ﴾

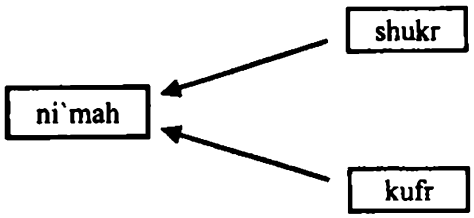
Verily man is very ungrateful to his Lord!

Al-'Ādiyāt, 100:6[2]

﴿إِنَّ الإِنسَانَ لَكَفُورٌ مُّبِينٌ﴾

Verily, man is clearly ungrateful!

Al-Zukhruf, 43:14 [15]



Thus, whether religious or non-religious, 'ingratitude' or 'ungratefulness' is the name of this way of responding on the part of a man to goodness shown by someone else. This structure itself remains the same regardless of whether the *ni'mah* (favor) that has been conferred upon him be of a secular nature or of a religious nature. And the pre-Islamic Arabs also used to live according to the dictates of the supreme moral rule: "*shukr* for *ni'mah*". The following verse by a poet of the Hudhayl tribe brings out this conceptual structure in a very clear and concise form:

فَإِنْ تَشْكُرُونِي تَشْكُرُوا لِي نِعْمَةً وَإِنْ تَكْفُرُونِي لاَ أُكَلِّفُكُمْ شُكْرِي

If you thank me, (it is but natural, for by so doing) you would be showing gratitude to me for a favor (*ni'mah*) I have conferred upon you, but if you take the attitude of *kufr* to me, I will never force upon you gratitude to me.[3]

And Salamah b. al-Khurshub, referring to a mare whose unusually swift legs saved the life of a man out of the danger of death:

فَأَثْنِ عَلَيْهَا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَهْلُهُ وَلاَ تَكْفُرْنَهَا لاَ فَلاَحَ لِكَافِرِ

Praise her well with a praise which is fitting, and be not ungrateful (*takfuran*) to her, for there can be no good future for the ungrateful (*kāfir*).[4]

And 'Antarah, still more tersely:

فَلاَ تَكْفُرِ النُّعْمَى

Never be ungrateful for a favor.[5]

The Qur'an takes up this structure just as it is and raises it up to a religious level, as it does in many other cases. The conceptual structure or formula is still exactly the same, but now it is made to work on the higher level of spiritual relation between God and man, the *ni'mah* being in this case the Divine favor to which man responds either rightly with *shukr* or wrongly with *kufr*.

Quite naturally, the concept of *shukr* (gratitude) in this particular semantic field develops easily into that of sincere 'faith' (*īmān*), and correspondingly, *kufr*, losing rapidly the original connotation of 'ingratitude', transforms itself into the concept of 'disbelief', and thus comes to stand in direct conceptual opposition to *īmān*.

﴿كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ﴾

How shall God guide people who turn to disbelief after having believed?

'Āli 'Imrān, 3:80 [86]

﴿قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا بِالَّذِي آمَنتُم بِهِ كَافِرُونَ﴾

Those who are haughty say: As for us, we disbelieve in that which you believe in.

Al-A'rāf, 7:74 [76]

This semantic transformation of *kufr* from 'ingratitude' to 'disbelief' was effected more completely than that of *shukr* from 'gratitude' to 'belief', because in this latter case the existence of the very word *īmān* made unnecessary, or rather prevented, the growth of another word which would replace it. While in the case of 'disbelief', there was no such pre-existent word for the concept, and so *kufr* just came in, so to speak, and took the vacant seat.

II. God of Wrath

To those who take *kufr* instead of *shukr* or *īmān*, that is to those who stubbornly refuse to humble themselves before God, and also to those who are naturally careless and frivolous who spend their time in jesting and playing, laughing, and merry-making, never thinking of the Hereafter, in short, 'indifferent' and 'careless' people (*ghāfilūn*)—to those people God shows his other face.

Here Allah is God of stern unrelaxing justice, the unrelenting Judge on the Day of Judgment, terrible in retribution (*shadīd al-'iqāb*), Lord of vengeance (*dhu intiqām*), whose anger (*ghaḍab*) will hurl anybody into ruin on whom it alights.[6]

This aspect of God has also been fully discussed by all those who have ever studied the Qur'an from the religious point of view so much so that it would seem unnecessary even to mention it now. So here I will only take up the human side of the matter, the problem, that is, how according to the Qur'an, man should respond to this aspect of God.

The pivotal point of all this is the eschatological concept of the Day of Judgment, with God Himself presiding over everything as the stern, strict and righteous judge, before whom men stand only in silence with bowed heads. The image of this decisive day should be held up constantly before the eyes of men in such a way that it might lead them to absolute earnestness, instead of levity and carelessness, in life. And this is the dominant note of the Islamic piety. All readers of the Qur'an cannot fail to notice, that this note of absolute

earnestness in life coming from the consciousness of the impending Day of Judgment is particularly strong in the Makkan period. This is *taqwā* in its original sense.

The word *taqwā* lost its extremely strong eschatological coloring as time went on and finally came to mean practically the same thing as 'piety'. But it denoted originally a very peculiar mood connected directly with the concept of the Judgment Day.

﴿وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ﴾

Fear God, for surely God is severe in punishment.
Al-Mā'idah, 5:3 [2]

The combination of the three words *ittiqā* (fear), *Allāh* and *'iqāb* (punishment) in this short sentence brings out very clearly the basic structure of the Qur'anic *taqwā* in its original form. The *taqwā* in this sense is an eschatological concept, meaning as it does "eschatological fear of Divine chastisement". From this original meaning comes the meaning of 'pious fear (of God)', and then finally, 'piety' pure and simple.

Now what did the word *taqwā* (or rather the verb *ittaqā*) mean in *Jāhiliyyah*? We must remark in the first place that in pre-Islamic times the word was not commonly used in a religious sense at all, except perhaps in the particular circle of the Ḥanīfs and those who were conspicuously under the influence of Judaism like the poet Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā. The word *muttaqī* (from *taqwā*), 'pious believer' (in the monotheistic sense) occurs, as we saw earlier, in the poetry of the Ḥanīf poet, Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt; also in the *Dīwān* of Labīd, whom I regard as almost a Ḥanīf in his religious outlook. Here I give an extremely interesting example from the *Dīwān* of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā.

وَمِنْ ضَرَّتِهِ التَّقْوَى وَيَعْصِمُهُ مِنْ سَيِّءِ الْعَثَرَاتِ اللهُ وَالرَّحِمُ

The *taqwā* is of his nature. It is Allah Himself who guards him from all fatal false steps and then (the principle of never breaking) ties of blood.[7]

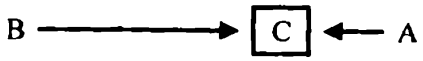
That this was not normally the meaning of the word in

Jāhiliyyah must be clear to all readers of pre-Islamic literature. And fortunately enough for our purpose, the verb *ittaqā* was one of the favorite words of the pre-Islamic poets. We meet with the word almost everywhere, always with exactly the same basic conceptual structure, and we have a great number of examples at hand. They show definitely that the word did not carry any religious connotation, let alone, the meaning of 'piety'.

What is, then, the basic conceptual structure disclosed by these examples? Nothing is more illuminating in this respect than the formula given by al-Tibrīzī in his commentary on *Dīwān al-Hamāsah*[8] which runs:

الاتّقاء أن تجعلَ بينكَ وبين ما تَخافُه حاجزاً يحفظك

Ittaqā means that you place between yourself (*A*) and something you are afraid of (*B*), something (*C*) which might protect you by preventing it (*B*) from reaching you.

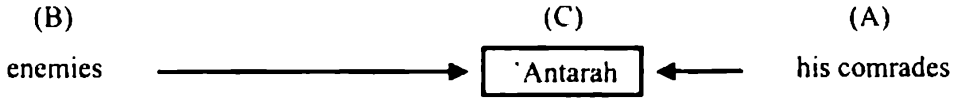


In short, it means self-defence by means of something. The general situation is this: A man (*A*) perceives something (*B*) coming towards him, which looks dangerous, destructive, or at least harmful. He does not like it to reach him; he must stop it before it reaches him and does harm to him. So he puts between himself and the thing (*B*) something (*C*) which is strong enough to stop its oncoming. All the pre-Islamic instances of this verb, however complex and complicated in outward form, are capable of being interpreted in terms of this basic formula. Here are a few typical examples. The first one is from the *Mu'allaqah* of 'Antarah:[9]

إنْ يتّقُونَ بِيَ الأسِنّةَ لَمْ أَخِمْ عنْهَا ولكِنّي تَضَايَقَ مَقدَمي

When (my comrades) put me between themselves and the spears of the enemies, (that is to say, when my friends pushed me ahead in front of them so that they might protect themselves behind me, I myself being their shield), I did not flinch at all; but—so he adds—(to my regret) I could not in any case advance very much because there was no more place left in front of me (*i.e.* there were so many enemies in front of me).

The situation is evidently like this:



The next one, from the *Mu'allaqah* of Zuhayr, discloses exactly the same pattern:[10]

وَقَالَ سَأَقْضِي حَاجَتِي ثُمَّ أَتَّقِي عَدُوِّي بِأَلْفٍ مِنْ وَرَائِي مُلْجَمِ

He said (to himself): I will satisfy my desire (*i.e.* I will kill the man who has killed my brother), then I (*A*) will defend myself (*attaqī*) against the enemies (*B*) (who will surely come to take revenge) with one thousand horses (*C*) all bridled in support of my cause.

The next example is somewhat more complicated, albeit with exactly the same underlying structure. It comes from *Dīwān al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*. The poet is al-Marrār b. Munqidh[11] who, although of the Umayyad period, composed his poems in the typically *Jāhilī* spirit.:

تَتَّقِي الأَرْضَ وَصَوَّانَ الْحَصَى بِوَقَّاحٍ مُجْمَرٍ غَيْرِ مَعِرْ

This is part of a description of the she-camel of the poet. My she-camel, he says, guards herself (*tattaqī*) from being hurt by the stony ground with her hard hoofs. Literally: "She puts between herself and the ground and sharp flint stones a hard one (*i.e.* hard hoof) which is compact and with its ring of hair still intact."

The Qur'an, too, offers an extremely interesting example in which the verb *ittaqā* is used in exactly the same physical, and not spiritual, sense.

﴿أَفَمَن يَتَّقِي بِوَجْهِهِ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ﴾

Is a man who, on the Day of Resurrection, can only guard himself against the evil of Divine chastisement with his face...

Al-Zumar, 39:25 [24]

The ironical implication being that on that day his hands, with which he ordinarily defends himself against danger, are tied up to his neck so that he has only his face to defend himself with. The sentence itself is left unfinished; the full meaning is somewhat like this: Is

such a man the same as those who are completely safe from chastisement?

But this is rather an exceptional case in the Qur'an; there *ittaqā* occurs almost always in contexts of a religious nature. In *Jāhiliyyah*, on the contrary, the verb is mostly used in a physical or material sense. The utmost to which *Jāhiliyyah* goes in this direction is represented by those cases in which the word is used in a moral sense, *i.e.* a degree more spiritualized than the purely physical and material sense.

The following example[12] is of particular interest in this respect, because it discloses the basic structure of this concept as applied to the moral sphere of life:

وَمَنْ يَجْعَلِ الْمَعْرُوفَ مِن دُونِ عِرْضِه يَفِرْهُ وَمِن لاَ يَتَّقِ الشَّتْمَ يُشْتَمِ

He who puts acts of generosity between his personal honor and (the possible reproach by others) will make his honor increase more and more, while he who does not guard himself (*yattaqi*) in this way against invectives will only be reviled.

It is interesting to note that the first half of the verse forms a kind of structural definition of the concept of *ittaqā*. Exactly the same thought is expressed in the following hemistich much more tersely:

وَكُلُّ كَرِيمٍ يَتَّقِي الذَّمَّ بِالْقِرَى

Every man of a noble nature guards himself against blame with hospitality.[13]

That is to say, he puts between himself, *i.e.* his personal honor, and the possible blame by others his act of spending his wealth in limitless hospitality.

We may rightly regard these cases in which the conceptual structure under discussion is applied to the moral sphere as an intermediate stage between the purely material *ittiqā* and the purely spiritual, religious *ittiqā*.

The Hanīfitic conception, to which belongs the Qur'anic thought, goes a step further and completely spiritualizes this conceptual structure. And yet the formal structure itself does not change. Here the

possible harm (*B*) is no longer an ordinary physical danger, but an eschatological danger, *i.e.*, the severe merciless punishment by God Himself to be inflicted upon those who refuse to surrender and to believe. In this context *ittaqā* means that one guards oneself against the imminent danger of Divine chastisement by putting between it and one's own soul a protective shield of pious obedience and belief. This interpretation is confirmed by the view taken by the authors of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, according to which the verb *ittaqā* means "That you guard yourself against the *'iqāb* (Divine chastisement) by putting between it and yourself the *turs* (shield) of *'ibādah* (worship—lit. *'abd*-ness)".

This basic structure is apparent in verses like the following:

﴿فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ﴾

Beware of the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones (i.e. idols), the Fire prepared for the Kāfirs.

Al-Baqarah, 2:22 [24][14]

﴿وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لاَّ تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَن نَّفْسٍ شَيْئًا﴾

Beware of a day when no soul shall take another's place.

Al-Baqarah, 2:45 [48]

Psychologically, this is a particular kind of 'fear' (*khawf*)—an eschatological fear, as is shown by some verses, such as:

﴿إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَةً لِّمَنْ خَافَ عَذَابَ الآخِرَةِ﴾

Surely therein is a sign for him who fears (khāfa) the chastisement in the Hereafter.

Hūd, 11:105 [103]

﴿قُلْ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ﴾

Say: Surely I fear (akhāfu), if I should disobey the command of my Lord, the chastisement of a dreadful day.

Al-An'ām, 6:15

The next verse is particularly important in this respect in that it shows the intimate semantic relationship that exists between the psychology of fear and *taqwā*.

﴿لَهُم مِّن فَوْقِهِمْ ظُلَلٌ مِّنَ النَّارِ وَمِن تَحْتِهِمْ ظُلَلٌ، ذَٰلِكَ يُخَوِّفُ اللَّهُ بِهِ عِبَادَهُ يَا عِبَادِ فَاتَّقُونِ﴾

*There shall be dark overshadowings of Fire above them, and beneath them too (similar) overshadowings. That is, God frightens (*yukhawwifu, causative form of khawf*) therewith His servants: O My servants, therefore fear (ittaqū) Me!*

Al-Zumar, 39:18 [16]

However, in course of time, this intense eschatological coloring becomes lighter and lighter until at last the meaning of *taqwā* reaches the stage, at which it has no longer any apparent connection with the image of the Day of Judgment and its horrors, and becomes the nearest equivalent of 'piety'. At this stage, *taqwā* has little or nothing to do with the concept of 'fear' (*khawf*). This is why, in the Qur'an. the word *muttaqī*—the participial form of *ittaqā*—is often used in the sense of a 'pious believer' standing in opposition to *kāfir*.[15]

The *muttaqī* at this stage is given a definition in the Qur'an itself, which does not differ substantially from that of *muslim* or *mu'min*. In the Sūrah al-Baqarah the *muttaqī* is defined as "a man who believes in the Unseen, performs the prayer regularly, expends of that which God has provided him, who believes in what has been sent down to the Prophet Muhammad and what has been sent down before Muhammad, and has a firm faith in the Hereafter".[16]

It is very interesting to observe that this is reflected in the non-Qur'anic literature of the earliest Islam, 'Abdah b. al-Ṭabīb, one of the contemporaries of the Prophet says in a poem:

أُوصِيكُم بِتُقَى الإِلَهِ فَإِنَّهُ يُعْطِي الرَّغَائِبَ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَمْنَعُ

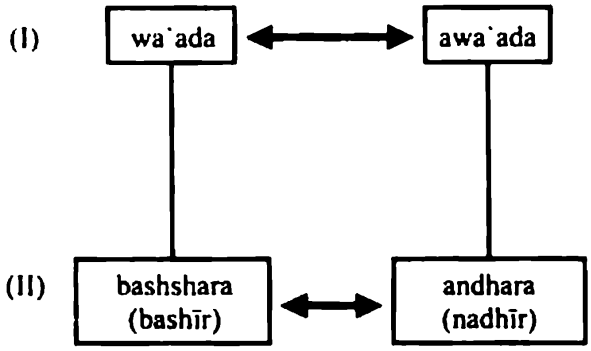
I enjoin upon you the *tuqā* (=*taqwā*) of God, for it is He who gives to, and withholds from, whomsoever He likes all things that is valuable and desirable.[17]

Here as we see, *taqwā* has nothing at all to do with eschatology and the fear of punishment. This is clear from the very fact that Divine goodness and favor are mentioned as the reason for which man should have *taqwā* of God.

III. *Wa'd* and *Wa'īd*

We have seen in the preceding that in the Qur'an God shows to men two entirely different faces according as men are good or bad in the religious sense: (1) a smiling face foreboding a bright future, pleasant things to come and (2) a dark angry face foreboding something gloomy and fatal. In this sense the problem is directly connected with the communicative aspect of the relation between God and man.

God communicates to man by these two different faces two different things concerning the ultimate destiny of man. This aspect of the matter is dealt with in the Qur'an in terms of four mutually related key-words.



The conceptual structure of the first pair (*wa'ada-aw'ada*) may be analyzed in the following way. (1) There are on the stage two persons *A*, *B* (two-person-relation word). (2) *A* tells *B* something. This means that the concept under discussion is a linguistic one. Furthermore, it is not an ordinary linguistic concept, but a weakened form of 'oath'. (3) The content of this information concerns something which *A* will do and which will bring about some new crucial situation into which *B* will be forcibly and unavoidably put. This information is given in a conditional form: if *B does* (or does not) do such and such a thing, then such and such a thing shall happen to *B*. (4) If this new situation happens to be something pleasant, delightful and agreeable from the point of view of *B*, then it is *wa'ad* (nominal form *wa'd*); if, on the contrary, it is something harmful

destructive and disagreeable, then it is *aw'ada* (nominal form: *wa'īd*).

In the concrete Qur'anic context, the first pair concerns the action of God Himself. In other words, *A* who informs *B* of all this happens to be God.

The second pair is of quite a different nature from this. A simple analysis of its basic structure will make it clear at once.

(1) There are on the stage three persons *A*, *B* and *C* (three-person-relation word). (2) The general situation, as far as concerns the basic relation between *A* and *B*, remains exactly the same. Only, *A*, in this case, does not inform *B* directly of what will happen. There is no direct connection between the two. The task of establishing a connection is given to another person *C*. *C* knows the actual situation; he goes from *A*'s side to *B* as a 'messenger' and tells him that such and such a thing is sure to happen to *B*. In the Qur'an, *C* is of course the Prophet. In this respect the Prophet appears on the stage in the capacity of either *bashīr* or *nadhīr*, according as the news he conveys is something good for *B* or bad. In the Qur'anic conception, this is an extremely important point regarding the function of a Prophet. The Qur'an insists constantly that Muḥammad is only a 'warner'.

﴿وَقُلْ إِنِّي أَنَا النَّذِيرُ الْمُبِينُ﴾

Say: Verily I am the clear warner (nadhīr).

Al-Ḥijr, 15:89

﴿إِنَّمَا أَنتَ نَذِيرٌ﴾

Thou art only a warner (nadhīr).

Hūd, 11:15 [12]

His function consists in warning unbelieving people that there will be Judgment followed by a dreadful punishment in the Hereafter. The same is true of the concept of *bashīr*. Only, there seems to be a slight difference between *bashīr* and *nadhīr*. According to the analysis done by Ibn al-'Arabī (author of the book *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*),[18] *al-bashārah* is not only an information given about something desirable but, the *bashīr* should always be the first person to convey the good news, *awwalu mukhbirin bi-l-maḥbūbī*, while *al-nadhārah* is an

information given about something unpleasant and anybody who imparts this information is *nadhīr*, the concept does not contain the condition of the informant being the first person to do it.

The following verse of 'Antarah[19] is interesting in that it presents the most important of the related concepts gathered in one place.

وَكَم مِن نَذِيرٍ قَدْ أَتَانَا مُحَذِّراً فَكَانَ رَسُولاً فِي السُّرُورِ يُبَشِّرُ

What the poet wants to emphasize is that the future is essentially unpredictable so that it is absolute folly to be worried about what is yet to come. "How many times", he says "has a warner who has come to bid us be on our guard against something bad turned out ultimately to be a messenger of delightful things bringing a good news".

It goes without saying that the second pair is most intimately related to the first pair and is based upon it. The following verse[20] brings out this connection very well.

وَعَظِيمِ الْمُلْكِ قَدْ أَوْعَدَنِي وَأَتَتْنِي دُونَهُ النُّذُرُ

> Very often a mighty Lord of a kingdom has threatened (*aw'ada*) me, and warnings from him have reached me before he came to me himself.

We may notice that in the verse that follows this immediately (44), the poet describes this mighty king as choking with rage just as the eyes of a leopard in anger are kindled with fire, which shows the situation very clearly.

As regards the contrast between *wa'ada* and *aw'ada*, we must remark that in *Jāhiliyyah*, the distinction is sometimes strictly made, sometimes not.

وَإِنِّي إِنْ أَوْعَدتُهُ أَوْ وَعدتُهُ لأُخْلِفُ إِيعَادِي وَأُنجِزُ مَوْعِدِي

> My nature is such that when I have threatened (*aw'ada*) him or promised (*wa'ada*) him something good, I am inclined to leave unfulfilled my threat (*I'ād=wa'īd*), but bring to pass my promise (*maw'id=wa'd*).[21]

In this verse which has been attributed also to Tarafah, the most definite distinction is made between the two, while in other places the two verbs are often used indiscriminately. Likewise, in the Qur'an, the distinction is rather loose. Just to give one example:

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْكُفَّارَ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ﴾

Allah has promised (wa'ada) the hypocrites, men and women, and the disbelievers the Fire of Hell.

Al-Tawbah, 9:69 [68]

And the *Kāfirs* of Makkah say sarcastically to the Muslims in reference to the Day of Judgment:

﴿وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

When will this promise (wa'd, meaning wa'īd) come true, if what you say is true?

Yā Sīn, 36:48[22]

As is well known, this distinction develops into an exceedingly important theological problem in early Islam, as is witnessed by the rise of a sect in the Mu'tazilah school of theology known under the name of *ahl al-wa'īd* (People of Threat) or *al-Wa'īdiyyah* headed by al-Jubbā'ī. Semantically, this is a very interesting problem, but here we must leave the subject untouched because a discussion of problems of this sort would take us far beyond the scope of the present study.

Notes

1. For a philological analysis of the key-terms of this field, see Daud Rahbar, *op. cit*, chapter XIII and chapter XVIII.
2. *kanūd* is a synonym of *kafūr*.
3. al-'Ajlān b. Khulayd, *Dīwān al-Hudhliyyīn*, III, p. 113, v. I.
4. *al-Mufaddaliyyāt*, V, v. 7.
5. *Dīwān*, p. 46, v. 3; *nu'mā=ni'mah*

6. 20:83 [81]
7. *Dīwān Zuhayr*, p. 162, v. 2.
8. CCLIV, v. 5.
9. *Mu'allaqah* v. 64.
10. *Mu'allaqah*, v. 36, *Dīwān*, p. 22, v. 2.
11. *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XVI, v. 30.
12. Mu'allaqah, *Zuhayr*, v. 51.
13. 'Amr b. al-Ahtam, *al-Ḥamāsah*, DCCXIII, v. 4.
14. The earlier commentators are of the opinion that by "stone" (*ḥijārah*) is meant "black brimstone" in Hell with which the damned will be tormented; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmī' al-Bayān*, ad. loc.
15. For example, 4:130 [131].
16. 2:2-3 [3-4].
17. *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XXVII, v. 7.
18. Cairo, 1957, Vol. I, p. 15.
19. *Dīwān*, p. 85, v. 5.
20. The poet is al-Marrār b. Munqidh, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XVI, v. 43.
21. 'Amir b. al-Ṭufayl, *Dīwān*, Beirut, 1959, XVII, v. 2.
22. According to al-Farrā' the word *wa'd* may be used in two senses: wide and narrow. When used in the wide sense it makes no distinction between 'good' and 'bad' (*wa'ad-tu-hu khayran*, "I promised him something good" and *wa'ad-tu-hu sharran*, "I promised him something bad"). In the narrower sense, it is only applied to *khayr*, leaving the "promise of bad things (*i.e.* threatening)" to *wa'īd*, cf. Ibn Qutaybah: *Adab al-Kātib*, Cairo, 1958, pp. 271-272.

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